

SOUTH INDIAN REBELLION

**The First War
of Independence
1800-1801**

K. RAJAYYAN

South Indian Rebellion: The First War of Independence, 1800-1801 brings out of oblivion the thrilling story of the heroic struggle, organised and waged by the patriots of South India, against British imperialism in the memorable years 1800-1801. Driven into despair by the betrayal of princes and the economic malady, brought in by alien conquest, the common people formed a grand confederacy for the re-establishment of Independence. In a conspiracy, formed in the caverns of the hills of Dindigul, they decided to launch the struggle with an assault on Coimbatore. The insurrection spread far and wide, from Tirunelveli to beyond the Kaveri, from Madurai to beyond the Krishna along the western region. The spectacular discovery of this great rebellion relegates 'Eighteen-Fifty-Seven' to the background and throws new vista of consequence into the history of freedom struggle in the past.

SOUTH INDIAN REBELLION
THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1800-1801

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South Indian Rebellion

The First War of Independence
1800-1801

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PREFACE

MY DISCOVERY of the South Indian Rebellion of 1800-1801 was quite accidental. Research for the M.Litt. and Ph.D. degrees carried me to an extensive study of the records in the archival institutions of South India. Here and there in the documents I came across references to rebel intrigues, conspiracies, confederacy and organised rebellion, which threatened the English with the destruction of their power. This was in 1957-1960. The curiosity that they excited in me was great, but I had to restrain myself, as I had to complete the projects already at hand. It was only in December 1965 that I could begin the study of the rebellion systematically. Yet even after two years of laborious research, a succinct account could not be obtained. At times I feared whether I took a grave risk and my project was heading towards failure. Fortunately, in the course of more patient exploration, some of the normally ignored papers, the so-called Individual Papers in the State Archives, Madras, came to my rescue. They furnished to me a few of the essential missing links in the saga of this great struggle. The ballads and legends, which I could gather from the villages subsequently, complemented the material that I collected on this unchronicled war.

I am greatly indebted to Thiru V. V. Ramaswamy of Virudhunagar, popularly known as V.V.R. A resourceful leader of varied interest, he has distinguished himself in freedom movement, education, journalism, legislation, co-operation and social reform. Keenly interested in the promotion of historical scholarship, he extended to me encouragement and patronage. A freedom fighter of the constitutional order, thinker with moral convictions and reformer with sincerity of purpose, he always insisted upon balanced approach and critical analysis of the problems in history. I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance that he rendered, and the enlightenment that he imparted, which contributed to the presentation of the present theme in its historical and analytical perspective.

Thiru P. Balasundaram of Madras Police, in a spirit of service, was generous to take me on a visit to the once rebel centres of

Tirunelveli and to obtain for me certain rare manuscripts from the villages. The personnel of Tamilnadu Archives and Madras Manuscript Library assisted me in the consultation of original source material. I convey to them my sincere thanks.

This work was undertaken during my service in Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. It was completed since I joined Madurai University, Madurai, in July, 1970. I consider it my privilege to acknowledge the academic freedom and research facility that I enjoyed in these institutions of learning.

Mr M. Sathyanarayana Rao of Rao and Raghavan, the enterprising educationist and publisher of Mysore, has entertained an abiding interest in this research project ever since my article on 'South India's Lead in Freedom Struggle' appeared in THE HINDU, in 1966. The keen enthusiasm that he displayed in promoting the publication of the work served as a constant source of inspiration. The Wesley Press, Mysore have done a nice job of production of the book. I am grateful to the publishers as well as the printers.

The present work constitutes an entirely original contribution to the History of India's Freedom Struggle. I am certain that the light it sheds is bound to explode numerous illusions and fantastic assertions that have cropped up in the realm of historians.

K. RAJAYYAN

DEDICATED
TO
THE PATRIOTS OF INDIA WHO LAID DOWN
THEIR LIVES IN DEFENCE OF
FREEDOM BEFORE INDEPENDENCE AND EQUALITY OF
OPPORTUNITY AFTER INDEPENDENCE



INTRODUCTION

FASCINATED BY the riches of the country, the Europeans came to India and prompted by the favourable attitude of the people, they continued to stay. They needed spices, cloves, pepper, indigo, pearls, silk and a variety of other goods. In the sale of these products they saw the possibility of reaping huge profits. To the strangers, the inhabitants—like the Red Indians of America—showed a sentimental hospitality. Reeling under the influence of a fatalistic philosophy, many seemed inclined to serve them with devotion. It seemed that the Indians had virtues, which were useful to the westerners, and weaknesses, that were harmful to themselves.¹

The century, that followed Timur's invasion of India in 1398, witnessed the unity, towards which the country was moving under the Khiljis and the Tughlaks, yielding place to anarchy. In the North the authority of the Delhi Sultanate dwindled. Local governors and adventurers seized control of the provinces. South India revolted, giving rise to two independent kingdoms: Vijayanagar and Bahmini. The prolonged struggle for the possession of Raichur Doab weakened both the powers. Bahmini kingdom disintegrated into five sultanates. The decisive victory gained by the Bahmini states over the forces of Vijayanagar in 1565 at Talikota hastened the eclipse of the latter power, too. Internal dissensions among the Bahmini states intensified the moment their common enemy in Vijayanagar vanished from the political scene. This weakened the country further. Late in the 17th century the Mughals made a powerful bid to reduce the country to unity but it proved a forlorn enterprise. Aurangzeb, the Emperor of the Mughals, occupied Bijapur in 1686 and Golconda in 1687. Before long the Mughals found themselves inextricably entangled in a war with the Marathas. The Empire declined and imperial unity again defied realisation. The emergence of a multiplicity of powers, always in conflict with each other, that came in the wake of the fall of the Delhi Sultanate and subsequently of the Mughal Empire, afforded an opportunity to the Europeans to play one against the other. If the collapse of the Sultanate helped their

¹ S. R. Sharma, *The Making of Modern India*, pp. 339-340.

commercial advancement, the fall of the Mughals contributed to their political ascendancy. In the absence of a central authority the rulers never achieved anything beyond provincial distinction. The oppressive rule, decadent administration, outmoded military equipment and defective composition of the armies left them unequal in their dealings with the foreign powers.

Though the internal conflicts were frequent, the country seemed prosperous. The conditions, as they had existed in medieval India, restricted the effects of war. Politics centred on the most influential families. Professional men fought and died, while the vast majority of the inhabitants engaged themselves in their material pursuits. The warring groups seldom molested the peasants and artisans, for they, by tradition, appreciated the services of these classes and realised their dependence upon their output. The simple habits and at times low purchasing capacity restricted consumption. No wonder the foreign observers, Nikitin, Barbosa and Nicolo Conti refer to the abundance of gold and silver, plenty of provisions, cheap living and a variety of manufactures in different towns. However, the villages did not appear to have prospered as the cities did, for the visitors often indicate the general poverty in the country. This would have been due to low purchasing capacity of the masses.² The glamour of the cities attracted the greedy foreigners.

Advent of the Europeans

In 1498 the Portuguese vessels reached Kozhikode on the Malabar Coast. Not long after this momentous event, they discovered the possibility of exploiting the conflicts among the local rajahs to their advantage. They acquired Goa in 1510 and made it their headquarters. This was followed by the establishment of commercial settlements all along the coastal strip. The most important of them were Surat, Daman, Bassein, Salsette, Cochin, Nagapatnam, San Thome, Masulipatnam and Hughli. What the Portuguese aimed at was no large territorial possession, for their resources did not permit it, but the command of the eastern market through alliances with the princes and control of isolated posts. The Arabs, the great commercial power of the period, were defeated and expelled. Amicable relations were established with the

² Ibid., pp. 20-27.

sovereigns of Vijayanagar. Though they were noted for oppressive rule, religious intolerance and wretched vices, they ruled the waves and the markets of the east for more than a century.³

The appearance of other European powers rendered the situation of the Portuguese difficult. In 1597 the Dutch came to the land. Enterprising and cosmopolitan in their outlook and directed by their country to build forts and make alliances with the Asiatic powers, they challenged the Portuguese from a footing of strength. In 1606 the fleet of Portugal was defeated in the battle of Malacca. Many of the settlements of the rival Europeans were subdued. Dutch factories were set up at Surat, Ahmadabad, Agra, Chinsura, Patna, Pulicat, Nagapatnam and Tutukudi. In 1689 the Dutch made Nagapatnam the headquarters of their commercial activity. Their trade was profitable, finance well maintained and settlements were fortified. However, they made no determined effort to entrench themselves in India. This was partly because they found their trade with the East Indies more lucrative and partly because they experienced increasing opposition from the British.⁴

In 1600 the English East India Company obtained a royal charter for trade with the Indies. It made a vigorous attempt to seize trade but was outmanoeuvred by the Portuguese and the Dutch. Thwarted in their endeavour to establish a profitable trade with the West Coast of India and in the East Indies, the English, whose principal base had been Surat, turned to the Carnatic, a region which lay remote from the spheres of their rivals. This disclosed itself as a land of promise, for it unfolded vast opportunities. A fertile territory, it supplied a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, rice and fish. Towns, which were numerous, not only manufactured the finest of cotton goods but served as natural outlets for the cotton, timber, millet, gold and precious stones of the Deccan plateau. The political climate too seemed encouraging, for the local princes, vanquished by Mughal arms, wanted to gain support from all possible quarters.⁵ No wonder the Company, enabled by these factors, established numerous settlements all along the Coast. Elsewhere in India the English opened factories at Agra,

³ Ibid., pp. 312-8.

⁴ Alexr Rea, *Monumental Remains of the Dutch East India Company in the Presidency of Madras*, p. 23.

⁵ M. E. Wilbur, *The East India Company*, pp. 104-5.

Ahmadabad, Broach, Hariharpur, Hughli, Kasimbazar and Patna. The Portuguese and the Dutch were defeated and British influence was extended to their spheres. As trade grew in volume and profits exceeded the limits of expectations, the British aspirations assumed a political overtone. As early as in 1687 the Company declared its resolve to 'establish such a polity of civil and military power and create and secure such a large revenue . . . as may be the foundation of a large, well grounded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come'.

In 1664 the government of France constituted the French East India Company for Trade with the East. It not only came late to the Indian market but as a department of the government shared the financial difficulties of the state. Guided by ambitious leaders, the Company decided to seek its fortune in political gamble rather than in commercial enterprise. In 1674 the French acquired Pondicherry and made it their capital in India. They founded trading centres at Surat, Mahe, Karaikkal, Masulipatnam and Chandranagar.⁶

British Ascendancy

The outbreak of hostilities with the French and their allied Indian powers set the stage for the political ascendancy of the English. In this crucial period the South, as the centre of political gravity, played the decisive role in shaping the destiny of the warring powers. The concentration of political and commercial interests of the European nations together with the location of the capitals of the major Indian states made this region the centre of diplomacy as well as intrigue, imparting to it an importance of great consequence.

Between 1746 and 1748 the English and the French fought the first war in the Carnatic. This led to three far-reaching, though indirect, results. About 1748 the English raised a body of Indian sepoys after the example set by the French, for the defence of Madras.⁷ The sepoy army, that had its incidental beginnings in this war, was destined to play a major role in the British campaigns during the years to come. Secondly, an incredible victory, gained by a French battalion over the Nawab's army near Adayar, revealed

⁶ V. B. Kulkarni, *British Dominion in India and After*, pp. 37-9.

⁷ Ilbert, *Government of India*, p. 33.

to the western world the superiority of European drill and discipline over the Indian multitudes in the field of battle. As could be expected, this discovery fired the military ambitions of the foreigner.⁸ Finally, the Europeans found in 'aid and alliance' with the Indian powers a possibility of wresting commercial and political advantages.⁹ They pursued this policy so relentlessly that in the long run the rulers of the land were either destroyed or reduced to be mere powerless pensioners.

The Second Carnatic War broke out in 1749 and continued up to 1754, in the course of which the foreign and local powers fought one of the most significant battles in Indian history at Tiruchirapalli. After the first round of the conflicts, it appeared that the French had gained a definite ascendancy, for their allied princes, Chanda Sahib and Muzaffar Jang, seized power at Arcot and Hyderabad respectively. In a desperate bid to regain the lost ground the English decided to rush to the aid of Mohammad Ali, son of Nawab Anwar-ud-din, who was slain in the battle with Chanda Sahib on the plains of Ambur. The scope for successful action appeared bleak but for Tiruchirapalli, an invincible fort and once the capital of the Nayaks of Madurai, where Mohammad Ali established himself. The bitter struggle for the citadel began in March 1751. The combined forces of the French and Chanda Sahib began a powerful siege, which continued in varying degrees of ferocity and changing fortunes until June 1752. Eventually, assisted by the forces of Mysore and Thanjavur, the English troops sallied, vanquished the French and killed Chanda Sahib.¹⁰ This great victory marked a turning point in British imperialism. At one stroke the triumphant Europeans administered a devastating blow to the French aspirations, political as well as commercial, and established their firm grip over the Carnatic. The resources of the country, which they mobilised for their subsequent wars, contributed to the vigorous prosecution of their political designs. No wonder soon after this momentous victory, Robert Clive led an expedition from the Carnatic to Bengal and in 1757 defeated Siraj-ud-Daula in the battle of Plassey. Tossed in the cross-currents of the strife at Tiruchirapalli, Mysore exhausted her resources, no

⁸ N. K. Sinha and A. C. Banerjee, *History of India*, p. 473.

⁹ R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, p. 8.

¹⁰ M. Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, Part 1, p. 177.

doubt with an eager yet futile expectation of obtaining possession of this rich territory, to that extent that it greatly crippled its military and material potential. Consequently, the state fell an easy prey to the invasions by the Nizam and the Peshwa and found itself embarrassed in its subsequent wars with the British.¹¹

Between 1756 and 1763 the rival European powers fought the third war in India. The French made a calculated endeavour to rehabilitate their fortunes but could advance nowhere near attaining it. Benefited by the command of the vast resources of the Coast, the English not only inflicted a deadly blow upon the designs of their bitter foe but also extended their authority over Coastal Andhra.¹² These wars sealed the fate of the French and left the English free to seek their fortunes in the Indian political situation.

At the end of the Carnatic Wars the political horizon of India appeared more darkened yet less confused than what it was at the dawn of the eighteenth century, when the Mughals entered the stage of decline. There emerged four powers of consequence, whose rivalry decided the destiny of the sub-continent. In the far South there was Mysore. In 1761 Hyder Ali, a soldier and statesman of remarkable ability, captured power. Despite the financial bankruptcy and frequent conflicts with the Peshwa and the Nizam, he built up a powerful war machine, extended the frontiers to different directions and transformed the state into a power to be reckoned with. Secondly, there was the Nizam in the Deccan. Nizam-ul-Mulk (1720-1748) threw off the Mughal authority, asserted his independence at Hyderabad and organised the state into a hereditary dynasty. Disputed succession, that came in the wake of his death, led to the outbreak of civil war but after a period of turmoil it regained political stability under Nizam Ali. The Nizam ruled over an extensive territory but neither did he create a sound administration nor possess an efficient army. Thirdly, there was the Maratha Confederacy. Since Sivaji moulded the Marathas into a nation and launched them on an imperial career, they established their influence over a vast region of India. However, in the battle of Panipat in 1761 the rising power of the Confederacy suffered a severe blow at the hands of the Afghans.

¹¹ Madras Council, 25 October 1756, Military Consultations, Vol. 5, pp. 344-6 and M. Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, Part I, p. 212.

¹² P. E. Roberts, *History of British India*, p. 12.

Attempts were made to retrieve the tarnished glory but internal squabbles and weak leadership rendered the impediments to recovery unassailable. Lastly, there was the English East India Company. Factories that it set up in the different regions of the country, grew into flourishing commercial settlements dealing with a variety of merchandise and into political centres doing active diplomacy as well as subtle intrigue. Among them Madras, Calcutta and Bombay rose to prominence. Acquired in 1639 Madras grew swiftly into the principle settlement on the Carnatic Coast. In 1652 it replaced Bantam in the Indies, as the headquarters of the Company's eastern trade. Its location near the capitals of the principal Indian powers and the European trading companies as well as the maritime routes to Bengal, Burma, Siam, China and the Philippines gave it a strategic and diplomatic importance of vast consequence.¹³ Bombay, acquired from the Portuguese in 1661, was made the British headquarters in western India in 1687. Situated within the sphere of Maratha influence, it developed into a military and naval stronghold.¹⁴ Calcutta, founded in 1690 in the delta of River Ganga, was strengthened with the construction of Fort William. The expansion of its trade in a variety of products of the Gangetic plain and extension of British sway to Bengal contributed to the rapid growth of the settlement into the principal of the presidency capitals.¹⁵ From these coastal strongholds the British spread the tentacles of imperialism to the plains of the interior.

Early Opposition to the Western Powers

The struggle against the aggressive powers of Europe was long and continuous. Rulers of territories and leaders of groups marshalled the forces of resistance. For nearly a hundred years the adventurous admirals of the Malabar Coast engaged the Portuguese in frequent conflicts. Kunjali III, the most dreaded among them, held the Portuguese at bay for nearly forty years up to 1595. The Zamudiri of Khozhikode in his war with these aliens sought the aid of Gujarat and Turkey. In response to his appeal Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent of Turkey despatched his

¹³ M. E. Wilbur, *The East India Company*, pp. 112-116.

¹⁴ P. E. Roberts, *History of British India*, p. 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 46 and 61.

fleet 'to avert the evil deeds of the Portuguese infidels and remove their flag from the sea'. Bahadur Shah of Gujarat died fighting against these Europeans in 1537. Ultimately, however, the naval might of Portugal prevailed over these powers. The attitude of the Mughal and Vijayanagar emperors favoured the rise of the Portuguese as a commercial power. The Mughals entrusted the protection of the pilgrim traffic to and from Mecca to them. The Rayas of Vijayanagar extended their patronage, as they supplied war equipment and seemed friendly to the Hindus.

In Bengal, however, the Mughals took measures, though not very energetic, to curb the growth of western influence. The exuberance and splendour of this province and the elegance and amiable disposition of the native women led to a saying among the Europeans: 'the kingdom of Bengale has a hundred gates open for entrance, but not one for departure'. With the establishment of their influence, their excesses in piracy and immorality assumed intensive proportions. Bernier reveals that they 'carried away the entire populations of the villages on market days, and at times when the inhabitants were assembled for celebration of marriage or some other festival'. Enraged at these outrages, Emperor Shah Jahan sent his forces for the punishment of the intruders. The Mughals raided the Portuguese settlements and the *Badshah-nama* asserts: '2,400 Christians of both sexes were taken prisoner, and nearly 10,000 inhabitants of the neighbouring country, who had been kept in confinement by these tyrants, were set at liberty'. The Dutch received a check in the far South. The forces of Travancore defeated them in the battle of Colachel in 1741.

The Mughals sent their army to Bengal to curb the British designs. Carried away by their imperialistic instincts and complaining against the exactions by the customs officials, the English sacked Hughli in 1686 and raided Balasore in 1687. Driven to indignation, Emperor Aurangzeb ordered the occupation of all British factories and prohibition of all trade with them. The English now submitted, agreed to pay 1,50,000 rupees in compensation for Mughal losses and undertook to 'behave themselves no more in such a shameful manner'. However, in 1688, when troubles again erupted, the Mughals invested the Company's factory at Surat. The British submitted a second time; they obtained pardon with the restitution of all goods, that were plunder-



From J. Welsh, Military Reminiscences

Native Horse Infantry



From J. Welsh, Military Reminiscences

Panjalamkurichi



From J. Welsh, Military Reminiscences

Palayamkottai



From J. Welsh, Military Reminiscences

Fort of Sholapur



From J. Welsh, Military Reminiscences
Fort of Komeri



By Courtesy of Archaeological Survey of India
Fort of Vellore



Statue of Marudu Pandyan in Kalayarkoil

ed from the Mughal ships. Yet Aurangzeb could do nothing effective, as he had no powerful navy and was not left free to divert his forces from the wars in South India. During the first quarter of the eighteenth century Kanhoji Angre from his strongholds at Kolaba, Suvarnadurg and Vijayadurg on the Konkan Coast led frequent expeditions and raided the British vessels. However, the attitude of the Marathas thwarted the possibility of holding the Company's fleet in check. Assisted by an English squadron under Clive and Watson, Peshwa Balaji Visvanath suppressed Angre and occupied his forts.¹⁶

The British ascendancy in the southern and eastern regions of India as a result of the Carnatic Wars excited reactions, but these seemed ineffective as they were neither widely organised nor properly co-ordinated. Subordinate chieftains, the poligars and zamindars, raised isolated disturbances during the early period. The most formidable of these rebellions occurred in Tamilnadu and Andhradesa. Among the leaders, who played a conspicuous role in the insurrections of the southernmost region, were Puli Tevar of Nelcatanseval, Varaguna of Sivagiri and Kattabomman of Panjalamkurichi, all in the Tirunelveli district. The Kallar tribes of Madurai waged a series of bloody contests, but the English took a terrible reprisal with indiscriminate massacres on a large scale. In Coastal Andhra the zamindars held aloft the banner of resistance. In 1794, when the Company proceeded rashly with the sequestration of Vizianagaram, Vizieram Rauze, the Zamindar, supported by the chiefs of Palkonda, Jeypore, Golgonda and Andra, assembled his armed men and defied the foreign authority. The Zamindar was killed in battle, after which his son, Narayana Rauze, continued the hostilities till peace was concluded with the restoration of his possession.¹⁷ In Bengal too sporadic outbreaks kept the British troops engaged occasionally. The country experienced oppressive assessment and rigorous exaction of revenue ever since the establishment of the direct administration of the Company in 1769 under the *diwani*, acquired from the Mughals. This led to disturbances in Dhalbhum between 1769 and 1774, in Rangapur in 1783, in Bishnupur in 1789 and in Midnapur in 1799. The Company's forces, however, suppressed the outbreaks and consolid-

¹⁶ S. R. Sharma, *The Making of Modern India*, pp. 331-340.

¹⁷ Bisheshwar Prasad, *Changing Modes of Indian National Movement*, p. 15.

ated its control.¹⁸ So complete was the failure of the initial endeavours, so humiliating was the surrender of the Indian rulers and so rapid was the stride made by the western sway that the British reduced an extensive part of India to a dependent state. A major effort was rendered essential for regaining independence. This came in 1800-1801. It represented the struggle of the South against the alien forces, which sought the destruction of India's cultural heritage and imposition of a strange order.

Sources of Information

The data on the Rebellion of South India are not considerable. The British records of the period, and ballads and legends furnish most of this scanty material. The District Records, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Special Reports and Consultations of the Madras Council constitute primarily the original sources. Of the different branches of the Proceedings of the Madras Council the Military Consultations, Revenue Consultations, Political Consultations and Secret Consultations are of particular value. The Despatches to and from England too refer to the major trends of the movement, thought in a compressed form. By the nature of things, as official versions given by an interested party, they are biased and coloured. Attempts have been made to suppress or dismiss the British disasters, to glorify or magnify their victories, to misrepresent their objectives, to misinterpret the popular aspirations and to dub the patriots as robbers, freebooters, marauders and the like. Added to these, the versions are by no means complete, for many a link is missing. As the proceedings of the rebels were secret, the English never sensed the real extent of the hostile move, which the patriots initiated in preparation of the rebellion. Even during the early stages of the insurrection the Company could obtain no definite picture. However, the records on the later phases of the movement furnish a more complete account. In 1830 Smith, Elder and Company, London, published a work entitled *Military Reminiscences* by James Welsh. An officer in the British army, J. Welsh served in the campaigns against the insurgents of Tamilnadu in 1801. As a narrative, given by an eye-witness, it is lively and thrilling, though it sheds no light on the early phases

¹⁸ S. B Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbances during the British Rule in India*, pp. 54-72.

of the rebellion in other regions of the South. Among the ballads and legends are the *Panjalamkurichi Azhivu Charithira Kummi*, depicting the fall of Panjalamkurichi, the rebel stronghold in Tirunelveli, to the British forces and *Sivaganga Seemai*, describing the story of the war in Sivaganga. Composed as folk songs, they are of imaginative versions and of colourful language. However, their utility for corroboration of the information furnished by the British records and for supplying a few of the missing links of the story of the great struggle cannot be ignored.

CHAPTER I

THREAT OF POLITICAL EXTINCTION

EMPIRES CRUMBLLED or languished, princes yielded or acquiesced and sepoy-forces surrendered or at times mutinied, but nowhere in India at any time did the common people organise and fight for a nationalist cause so extensive, so violent a rebellion against British imperialism, as the patriots of the South did in the memorable years 1800-1801. As the eighteenth century advanced towards its end, the cloud of horrors, wrought by an alien sway, thickened and the masses moved swiftly into a climate of despair, bewilderment and revenge. Ridden with blatant evils, the wanton obliteration of political institutions bequeathed by the past and systematic spoliation of the material glories possessed by the land, British imperialism with all its abhorrent ramifications drifted inescapably into a violent collision against a concerted challenge, organised by the peasants. This was the South Indian Revolt, the most widespread of all the liberation wars of the pre-Congress epoch and the first and the last violent popular struggle of any formidable dimensions in the annals of British India. The historical records of the period throw light on the political and economic developments that led to this great Rebellion.

A Polity of Checks and Balances

It has been argued with considerable force that the eighteenth century presented an entirely dark period in the history of India. The conflicts and clashes that came in the wake of the collapse of the Mughal Empire spread so sweeping a wave of turmoil and tumult across the country that it left a gloomy impression, but this impression is considerably removed from reality. True that the turmoil had its impact, it cannot be denied; but it was restricted to the crest of the polity, for it left the main stream of life largely unaffected and the inhabitants continued to enjoy their rights. The British-Indian administrators, who had attempted a detailed and systematic study of the working of the South Indian polity of the eighteenth century had concluded very appropriately that the institutions of administration remained sound and the rights of

the inhabitants were left inviolate. Thomas Munro upon a review of the political system of the provinces of Kanara and Soonda had declared categorically that there existed the foundations of a simple form of government based upon the ideals of the least administrative interference in social life and respect for the proprietary rights on land. In consequence society not only attained material prosperity but also a high degree of civilisation.¹ Discussing the polity and economy of South India, William Fullarton had observed in 1784 that the country had experienced the refinements of civil polity and regulation, suited to its condition, ages before it ever heard the name of the European. The people had their customs as laws, had their own jurisprudence, had evolved an established order and had enjoyed all rights of property. Though the social order had evils as in other societies, the inhabitants had attained and enjoyed a high degree of order, civilisation and material prosperity.² This happy trend in the social set-up had been rendered possible because of a system of checks and balances, complex and subtle, provided by the princely order, poligari system and village communities; the first autocratic, the second responsive and the third representative in their respective relations with the people. The limitations imposed by the interactions within a three-tier polity guaranteed the adherence to *mamool* or custom as the basic law and this in turn sustained the popular rights.

Before proceeding to examine how the checks and balances in the polity worked, a brief description of the three orders may be attempted. At the summit of the body politic was the princely order. As the Mughal Empire moved into its period of decay, there came a political transformation of great magnitude. The provinces asserted their independence, organising themselves into hereditary monarchies—the Carnatic and Mysore in the south, Hyderabad in the Deccan, Maratha states in the western and central region and Bengal and Awadh in the east. These local powers divided the country among themselves; yet they filled the political vacuum created by the exit of the Mughals from the scene and preserved among themselves the independence of the country. They

¹ Madras Council, 9 October 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, p. 75.

² W. Fullarton, 13 August 1784, Report to Lord Macartney, Military Sundries, Vol. 66, pp. 241-256.

maintained law and order, revitalised the tottering administration and promoted political stability. Evils in the system, however, seemed glaring. Armed themselves with legislative, executive and judicial powers, they sought absolute authority. Separation of powers was not attempted. If distribution of executive powers was enforced, it was done, at the most, vaguely. Because of these anomalies two fundamental factors guided the promotion of public welfare and preservation of popular interests: firstly, the political atmosphere of the country in general and secondly, the personality of the princes, both of which could not be predicted with any degree of certainty. Engaged in wars, arising from the repeated attempts made by the waning Mughals to regain their vanishing glory and the aggressive powers to extend their frontiers, or saddled in embarrassments, to which the mistaken policies inevitably led them, the rulers frequently displayed a strong propensity to oppress the inhabitants and to neglect the public welfare. However, what checked them in their possible drift to oppressive rule were the impediments, presented by the working of the parallel institutions and popular adherence to custom.

Secondly there was the order of auxiliary powers. Known as poligars, at times as rajahs and zamindars, these chieftains occupied a key position in the political structure between the princes and their subjects. Were they a class of robbers and freebooters? Frequently, the British administration, deliberately or inadvertently, had depicted them as an order of lawless banditry. This characterisation went in consonance with its established policy of maligning its victim before it did away with. However, the inhabitants, who knew them intimately, held a diametrically opposite view. In 1799 the inhabitants of Rajapalayam in Tirunelveli represented to the Madras Council that when the poligars exercised their jurisdiction over them, they treated them with respect and extended assistance and protection. They helped in the settlement of disputes between the inhabitants and public servants and obtained for the ryots the *circar's* permission for the cultivation of public lands. If the administration in its demand exceeded the terms of the revenue settlement, the poligars intervened on behalf of the inhabitants and forced the *circar* to do justice.³ In general, reason and justice guided these chiefs in their dealings with their people.

³ Board of Revenue, 14 January 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 217, p. 374.

The poligar of an Anamalai *palayam* in Coimbatore assessed his people nothing more than what he was forced to pay to the English Company as rent, while he contented himself with what he could raise from his own private land, for which he kept 120 ploughs.⁴ The British administration too had admitted that the rajahs of the West Coast were enlightened chiefs, whom the inhabitants traced to an ancestry of the remotest period and held in high esteem.⁵ However, it cannot be denied that there were instances when one poligar or another committed depredations in princely territories, oppressed the people and robbed each other. This was particularly an isolated phenomenon of the last decades of the eighteenth century. In their bid to mobilise the total resources of the country for the prosecution of their aggressive wars against the Indian and European powers, the Anglo-Saxons made exorbitant demands upon the allied princes; unable to furnish them, the latter, supported by the British arm, turned against the subordinate chiefs, who in their turn moved against the villages. This development in consequence reflected the stresses and strains, excited by the alien sway, for which the English were entirely responsible and guilty. B. Hurdis, Collector of Salem, in his report to the Board of Revenue in 1797 has asserted: '... the character of the poligars, I do not conceive, to be fairly understood. The Europeans have received their impression from the *amils* of the Nawab of the Carnatic and have enquired no further. As they have been plundered by the administration, they have deemed it essential to plunder others; this does not show their character, but their act. The poligars are called refractory and detachments moved against them to overcome their resistance by terror and when it is satisfied in its full extent, the instrument by which it was enforced was withdrawn. However no attempt was made to win their confidence; we understand from the official papers that demands were made for tribute, we hear the demands were refused and we hear that fire and sword exacted, what was demanded'.⁶

The poligars in fact rendered an inestimable service to the community. Regularised in their possession of territories called *palayams* by the sovereigns of Vijayanagar, these chiefs assumed

⁴ Ibid., 22 May 1797, Proceedings, Vol. 178, p. 2921.

⁵ Papers on the Administration of Malabar, 20 February 1804, p. 7.

⁶ B. Hurdis, 4 May 1797, Letter to the Board of Revenue, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 178, pp. 2923-5.

a constitutional responsibility as a second line of defence against external aggression and as guardians of public order and peace against internal commotion. They paid rent to the ruler for their lands and maintained bands of armed men for service with the troops of the state in critical times. They undertook to protect private property against robbery and pay compensation in the event of their failure.⁷ As guardians of public welfare, they enforced police authority, administered justice, founded villages, conducted religious festivals, maintained temples, promoted cultivation and assisted charitable activities.⁸ As an intermediary authority, they performed what the rulers normally neglected to do in the field of public welfare. While the common people found it beyond their reach to gain positions in the central administration, they experienced no such difficulty in the poligari establishments. This created and nurtured a bond of affinity between the poligars and the masses.

Thirdly, there was the order of local establishments. The working of the village communities ensured to the inhabitants the basic requirements, primarily local, at a time when life had not become sophisticated, what they felt essential for the promotion of their well-being. Presided over by a headman called *patel* or *maccadam*, the village had its own local assembly and administrative system. All land-holders or all communal heads sat in the assembly as its members. The administrative establishment consisted of village guards, local jury, revenue-peons, accountants and scavengers. The village guards, known as *kavalkars*, paid by the community, kept watch at night, noted all arrivals and departures, observed the movements of strangers and reported all suspects to the *patel*. They traced culprits, keeping track of their footprints. If the stolen property could not be recovered, the village community paid compensation to the victim of robbery, as the poligars did, by a levy either on the village guards or on all members of the community.⁹ Thus it shouldered full responsibility for the protection of private property. The local jury called the *panchayat* settled the disputes, generally through arbitrations and occasion-

⁷ Madras Council, 4 September 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 97, p. 2246.

⁸ B. S. Ward, *Memoir on Madura and Dindigul*, Vol. 3, pp. 68-72.

⁹ K. Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, pp. 93-94.

ally by verdicts. The revenue-peons of the village collected the taxes, assessed by the *circar* for the village, remitted the amount to the public treasury and kept the residents regularly informed of rules, issued by the administration from time to time. Endowed with its own revenue, levied on harvests, the village administration regulated the distribution of water for irrigation, kept the streets clean, looked after the welfare of travellers and conducted public festivals.¹⁰ In fact the village communities combined in themselves social welfare policy with republican and representative institutions. The inhabitants, whose interests were limited and whose needs were local, appeared to have remained indifferent to political convulsions, so long as the autonomy of their villages was left undisturbed and its working uninterrupted. Sir Charles Metcalfe has given testimony to this conspicuous service rendered by the local institutions through the ages. 'The union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, I conceive, contributed more than any other to the preservation of the people of India through all revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and it is in a high degree conducive to their happiness and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence'.¹¹

What served as correctives to the forces of anarchy, the evils of autocracy and the anomalies of administration were the mutual restrictions imposed by the parallel working of the three orders, the distribution of powers, the importance attached to the observance of custom and the bond of union that existed between the *poligari* system and the village communities. It might be an exaggeration to suppose that the distribution of powers and duties among the princes, *poligars* and village communities had represented a nascent federalism, for it lacked legalised autonomy, defined jurisdiction and universal applicability. Yet, by and large, the princes gave the maximum importance to the maintenance of political stability, the *poligars* to the preservation of law and order and the village communities to the promotion of social welfare. These institutions had their independent revenue. The

¹⁰ Selections from the Records of Fort St. George, 13 May 1815, Nos. 2, 9 and 11.

¹¹ Minute dated 7 November 1830 (Quoted in Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 1, p. 353).

sources of income centred on agriculture. Limited and inflexible, as they were, any excess committed by one institution marked an aggressive encroachment upon the sources of other institutions; in consequence of which it excited a natural opposition. This gave, though indirectly, a particular significance to custom or *mamool*, for unwritten laws sanctified by tradition, precedents and long usage, regulated their mutual and respective relations with the inhabitants. If the village communities lacked the teeth of armament to resist tyranny, the poligari system supplied it. This was a development brought in by the union of interests, that developed in the relation of the poligars with the villages. The rulers, whether of the Carnatic, Thanjavur, Mysore or Hyderabad, being strangers to the soil, the poligars, as the representatives of ancient royal houses, entertained a special obligation in upholding the established order. No wonder, the English administration itself had admitted that they extended their protection to the victims of princely oppression¹² and the inhabitants looked upon them as the protectors of the defenceless cultivators.¹³ J. Hodgeson in his report on Tirunelveli had concluded that the poligars considered themselves as the defenders of *mamool* and they remained loyal to the rulers to the extent that the rulers remained loyal to the *mamool*.¹⁴ Sons of the soil, they distinguished themselves in their role as ryots among the ryots in times of peace and leaders of armed men, furnished by the villages, in times of turmoil. They shared in all the vicissitudes, of prosperity as well as adversity, with the common people. If the inhabitants were subjected to repression, they represented their grievances to the rulers, for which they stationed their *stanapatis* in their courts and if no redressal could be had, they guided the inhabitants in their subsequent dealings with the *circar*.¹⁵

The integration of the *kaval* system of the villages with the poligari system not only strengthened the bond of unity between the two institutions but accorded recognition to the poligars as

¹² Madras Council, 24 July 1801, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 110, pp. 1405-6.

¹³ Madras Council, 27 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257, p. 5678.

¹⁴ J. Hodgeson, Report on Tinnevely, p. 22 and Board of Assigned Revenue, 31 December 1785, Proceedings, Vol. 8, pp. 616-621.

¹⁵ Madras Council, 24 July 1801, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 110, pp. 1405-7.

the accepted leaders of the villages. From time immemorial every village had its local police called *kaval* or watch. As the eighteenth century entered its second phase, mounting disorders endangered the established order. This rendered the task of the village communities in keeping law and peace onerous. Confronted with this critical situation, the villages appealed to the poligars for protection. In response the chieftains assumed control of *kaval*; they reappointed the village guards or appointed their own servants and restored peace. In return for this service and the continued performance of it, the communities paid them a voluntary but nominal contribution called *deshakaval*. This development was of vast significance. On the one hand it guaranteed the stability of the village communities and on the other greatly enhanced the influence of the poligars.¹⁶ The combination of the spirit of independence of the poligars and the principles of representation of the village communities imparted a fresh vigour to political stability at the popular level and galvanised the people's will to fight any encroachment, made by the central administration upon what they considered as their conventional spheres of interest and activity.

This polity based upon division of powers, a system of checks and balances and compromise of autocratic institutions at the higher level with representative institutions at the lower level of the social order, should not be confused with later political ideas based upon democratic institutions and separation of powers; but in the absence of anything better it went a long way in safeguarding the rights and promoting the interests of the individuals in the community. However, what the English proceeded to do quite arbitrarily against the working of this system threw the independence of the country into jeopardy and cut into the rights of the people.

Subversion of States

Taking advantage of the suicidal conflicts of the princes and the indifference of the inhabitants to the politics at the summit, the western powers embarked upon a policy of active intervention in the political affairs of the country. A few of the rulers, who fought the western sway as true patriots, perished or were reduced

¹⁶ K. Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, pp. 67-68.

to beggary, while others, who took shelter under the British system of aid and alliance, compromised with surrender and continued to play second fiddle to their designs. These developments threatened the working of the established polity.

In 1757 Bengal, falling a victim to gross ineptitude and wanton treachery, passed under British sway. Subsequently, Mir Quasim made a valiant bid to retrieve the lost ground, but the odds proved too insurmountable for his resources. Delhi and Awadh made a mockery of their political existence, when they sustained a severe humiliation at Buxar in 1764. Emperor Shah Alam II, losing heart, signed away Coastal Andhra to the aggressor by the Treaty of Allahabad. The Dravidian South made a more determined effort to check European aggression. Chanda Sahib of Arcot, Pratap Singh of Thanjavur and Khan Sahib of Madurai fought against the English Company, though they proved unequal to their enemy and suffered for want of a patriotic vision. However, Mysore under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, assisted by the poligars of the South, spearheaded a prolonged struggle in the second half of the eighteenth century. Despite the determined endeavour made by these princes, the Anglo-Saxons, ably aided by the Indian powers, overwhelmed the challenge and annexed an extensive territory consisting of Dindigul, Salem, Coimbatore, Wynaad, Malabar, Kanara and Soonda. Not long after the fall of Mysore, the apparently formidable Maratha Empire collapsed before the British onslaught like a house of cards.

More than military conquests the princely complicity created a serious crisis for the national survival of the inhabitants. For want of exertion and judgment, and in consideration of ease and comfort, the Indian powers readily accepted the British system of aid and alliance, an intricate trap aimed at the entanglement of their political individuality and the making use of their resources not only against the patriotic rulers but against their own subject populations. Among them the most notorious in the South were the rulers of Travancore, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, Arcot, Mysore, Poona and Hyderabad. Dharma Rajah of Travancore (1758-1798), acclaimed as one of the greatest rulers of this state, wrote to Madras government on the 28th of August 1788: ' . . the friendship and attachment I bear to the English Company are known to the whole world. . . . I call the Almighty to witness

that I rest my whole dependence on them for support. . . .’ Again on the 5th of November 1788 he declared ‘The Almighty God knows the sincerity of my long friendship with the English, whose power I consider as the means of my preservation; may He, of His infinite goodness grant the continuance of their prosperity and success’. In disregard to the freedom of his state and for fear of external aggression, the Rajah welcomed a British force, really intended to hold him in check, in the name of defence, agreed to pay for its expenses, accepted the Company’s arbitration in his disputes with other powers and surrendered the control of his foreign policy. In the wars against Mysore and the poligars of Tamilnadu he rendered active service to the enemy; he furnished troops and provisions.¹⁷ The Tondaiman of Pudukkottai, Vijaya Raghunatha, completely identified his interests with the British. A devoted loyalist, as he was, he served them with unswerving fidelity; never withheld the supply of provisions, sheep and armed men, whenever they were demanded.¹⁸ When the Mysore War broke out in 1799 he marched his troops and rushed supplies in support of the alien power. He did not stop with this; he wrote in humiliating words to Edward Clive, Governor of Madras: ‘In the Temple of the Almighty it is my first prayer that in whatever affair the Company may be pleased to employ me I may if it be necessary make an offering of myself and establish a good name’.¹⁹ Upon the fall of Tipu, fighting against the European power till his death, Krishna Rajah Wodayar ignored nationalist interests, for he cheerfully consented to serve the ends of the foreigner in return for the elevation of his person to the throne of that truncated state. The subsidiary treaty signed by him on the 8th of July 1799, admitted British troops into his kingdom, placed the forts at their disposal and exposed his territory for their commercial exploitation. He agreed to pay twenty four and a half lakhs of rupees annually for the support of the British forces²⁰ and granted to the Company an undisputed right to demand additional contributions for the con-

¹⁷ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads*, Vol. 10, pp. 115-130.

¹⁸ A. Sashiah Sastri, *Origin and History of the State of Pudukkottai and its Relations with the British*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Tondaiman, 14 September 1799, letter to Lushington, Board of Revenue, Consultations, Vol. 235, p. 8067.

²⁰ Madras Council, 23 July 1799, Secret Consultations, Vol. 8, pp. 516-537.

duct of its wars against the Indian rulers, the most extensive right of interposition in the internal affairs of the state and an unlimited authority of assuming the direct management of the administration.²¹ Free from the threat of hostility, wielded by Mysore so long, and in consequence of the total identification of its interests, the English found it no difficult a task to deal with the Peshwa and the Nizam from a position of vantage.

The Nawab of the Carnatic too allowed himself to be eclipsed completely. Mohammad Ali, the Wallajah prince of Arcot, enlisted the service of the English in his wars against Chanda Sahib. The final victory which devolved on him gave an opportunity to extricate himself from the unequal alliance; yet he got himself entangled in the Anglo-Saxon machinations by his short-sighted policy of seeking their aid for the suppression of the auxiliary powers. He made the cession of Chengleput to the Company in 1763 and assigned the revenue of the Carnatic in 1780-1784, which enabled it to overwhelm the grand endeavour, made by Hyder Ali against it during the Second Mysore War. By the Treaty of 1787 Mohammad Ali accepted British protection, surrendered his forts, granted to the Company the right to dismantle them, if it so decided, contributed funds for military support and agreed to pay four-fifths of annual revenue for the duration of any war conducted by it in South India.²² In 1790 when the English declared war on Mysore, they assumed the administration of revenue of the Carnatic and directed it for the conduct of war. The Nawab resented this, but his protest was only so verbal, that it produced no effect at all.²³ The English restored the possession of the country to the Nawab in 1792 but in return exacted another treaty, which granted them undisputed right to take over the revenue of the country and retain it during any of their wars, irrespective of whether they were defensive or aggressive in South India, to assume exclusive military authority over the East Coast and to collect tribute directly from the poligars. Guaranteed of no benefit in return for the service he rendered during the wars, the prince accepted the status of a mere political spectator.²⁴

²¹ Marquess Wellesley's *Dispatches*, Vol. 2, p. 75.

²² C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 22.

²³ William Medows, 27 July 1790, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 137, p. 2357.

²⁴ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 236.

The Rajah of Thanjavur shared a similar fate. In 1773 in return for the payment of a bribe of thirty-five lakhs of rupees the Company extended its military assistance to Mohammad Ali for the annexation of the kingdom.²⁵ Three years later, it repudiated what it had done and restored the state to the possession of the deposed ruler, Tuljaji. In return for this 'service'—a service of restoration of what it usurped—the Rajah was required to accept British protection, pay an annual tribute of twelve lakhs of rupees and cede the valuable commercial centre, Nagore. As could be expected, the prince accepted the terms.²⁶ In 1787 on the death of Tuljaji his adopted son, Serfoji ascended the throne. Now Amir Singh, the half brother of Tuljaji, agreed to serve as a willing tool in the hands of the westerner. Losing no time, the jubilant Madras Council declared the adoption of Serfoji irregular and elevated Amir Singh to power. In 1787 the new ruler in acknowledgment of the assistance he received, signed a treaty by which he agreed to contribute in the name of the defence of his state fifteen lakhs of rupees—though there existed no threat of external aggression, and in times of war three-fourths of his revenue.²⁷ In 1790 the Company, despite the opposition of the prince, took over the administration of revenue and diverted it for the prosecution of its war against Mysore.²⁸ After three years the assumption was terminated but a fresh treaty entitled the Company to collect the revenue whenever it fought a war in South India and to retain it for its duration.²⁹ Groaning under a heavy financial burden, imposed by these settlements, the prince found it impossible to make remittances with any regularity. The default in payments coupled with his refusal to assign the revenue of his territory, as demanded by the Company, drove it into indignation.³⁰ Now the adroit westerner resorted to the fantastic step of declaring the adoption of Serfoji regular and elevating this young prince to

²⁵ Mohammad Ali, letter received on 23rd January 1776, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 25, pp. 2-6.

²⁶ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 270.

²⁸ Amir Singh, 8 December 1790, letter to Madras Council, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 40, p. 235.

²⁹ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 278.

³⁰ Amir Singh, 20 January 1796, letter to Madras, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 47, p. 30.

power.³¹ Eager to cultivate the favour of his imperial masters, Serfoji mobilised the entire resources of the state for aiding the Company in its war against Mysore in 1799.³² Yet soon after the destruction of Tipu's power had been accomplished, the prince found his radiant hopes shattered, shattered irretrievably. The Britons forced him to sign a treaty, characterised by them as for 'cementing the friendship and alliance between them and the Rajah of Tanjore and for establishing the government of Tanjore on a permanent foundation'. It was a paradox that this tightening of friendship deprived the prince of the possession of his territory and extended the British rule to the fertile delta of the Kaveri.³³

The Peshwa and the Nizam, as the powerful rulers of the period, owed to the country a special responsibility for the defence of freedom, but they too accepted the western protection with no hesitation. British intervention in the complicated internal affairs of the Maratha Confederacy precipitated the outbreak of hostilities in 1775. Long considered as invulnerable, the Maratha Empire revealed that this was as much an illusion as the mirage of a desert. In spite of the humiliation he suffered during this war and the assistance he received from Mysore, subsequently in 1790 the Peshwa entered into an offensive and defensive alliance against Tipu with the common enemy. The Nizam of Hyderabad too joined this coalition. After an obstinate struggle, the valiant Tipu accepted terms; surrendering half of his territory to the enemy and its Indian allies. The Marathas and the Nizam shared in the booty with the foreign power. Subsequently, Hari Punt, the commander of the Maratha army, made entreaties for military aid in return for the payment of subsidy for the suppression of the poligars, but the collusion did not materialise.³⁴ In 1766 Nizam Ali, ruler of Hyderabad, accepted a humiliating settlement, mis-called treaty of mutual alliance and friendship. He surrendered to British protection, welcomed a subsidiary force into his territory and ceded the fertile districts of Ellore, Chicacole, Rajamundry, Mustafnagar and Guntur. Vicissitudes soon overtook this alliance.

³¹ Madras Council, 15 October 1798, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 4, pp. 200-208.

³² Ibid., 6 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, p. 4782.

³³ Treaty of Tanjore, 25 October 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 259, pp. 6736-6796.

³⁴ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 3, p. 6.

Driven to consternation at the blatant failure of the Company in supporting him in the war against the Marathas, he dismissed the subsidiary force in 1795. But before long he implored for its assistance to suppress a rebellion, organised by his son, Ali Jah. The Anglo-Saxons responded and the Treaty of 1798 provided for the stationing of the subsidiary force in Hyderabad permanently. This resulted in the consolidation of British control over the Nizam. In 1799 when the Fourth Mysore War broke out, Nizam Ali sent his forces in support of the alien power, in return for which, he obtained possession of the districts of Gooty, Gurrunkonda and Chitaldroog from the vanquished state.³⁵ The subordinate status, so voluntarily accepted by the Nizam, conferred upon the English great advantages: it relieved them from that anxiety in which the French intrigues at Hyderabad had kept them for long, enabled them to station an army at the cost of his exchequer and to employ these troops together with his detachments for the liquidation of Tipu's power.³⁶ The growth of British influence in Hyderabad continued so unhindered that in 1800 the Nizam assigned the extensive Ceded Districts in lieu of his disbursements for the subsidiary forces.³⁷

These unequal and complicated alliances spelled so calamitous a strain upon the working of the checks and balances in the polity that they proved detrimental to the rights and interests of the people. The rulers signed away extensive regions. The people of these ceded territories were thrown into the oppressive situation of being ruled by the commercial-minded strangers. In other regions too, nominally or really ruled by the princes who identified their interests with the westerner, the latter had obtained a commanding position. British forces garrisoned the forts and displayed a disposition to assume the administration at their will, as they did in 1790 in the Carnatic and Thanjavur. The intriguing alliances not only raised the princely expenditure to unwarranted levels but imparted a strength and vigour to the engine of oppression and exaction, quite impossible for the other balancing forces to combat. By the Treaty of 1787 Rajah Amir Singh of Thanjavur contributed twenty-four and a half lakhs of rupees

³⁵ Ibid., Vol. 5, pp. 2-6.

³⁶ Madras Council, 18 April 1799, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 5, p. 314.

³⁷ Ibid., 23 October 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, pp. 723-743.

annually out of his total revenue of thirty-five lakhs as tribute and for the liquidation of British claims, leaving a small fraction of the public income for the expenses of the royal household and the state.³⁸ The revenue of the Carnatic by 1787 was estimated at seventy-one lakhs of rupees,³⁹ out of which the Nawab was forced to contribute such a high amount as sixty-three lakhs for the protection and for the liquidation of debts, mostly incurred in his name for the conduct of British wars on the East Coast against European and Indian powers.⁴⁰ There hardly remained anything for the upkeep of his cumbersome palace establishments and to run the unwieldy administration. Evidently he could not undertake any measure calculated to promote the welfare of his subject population, nor any step to improve his administration. Under a heavy financial burden corruption multiplied and violence instead of law decided the method of collection. The additional levies increased by leaps and bounds and reached the only limitation imposed upon them by the ability of the people to submit. Even in 1784, when the public contribution to the English was not so high and not so embarrassing as it was under the Treaty of 1787, the Nawab had collected eighty-four per cent of the crops, harvested by the peasants, as tax.⁴¹ Supported by the British arm, the administration became more and more arrogant; the rigours of corruption and exaction paralysed the working of remedial forces and crippled the economy. The resistance by the poligars and the village communities offered a corrective to maladministration but the treaties firmly provided that if exaction excited reaction, the rulers could seek the Company's aid for the suppression of internal opposition. In the past the auxiliary powers found it no difficult a task to check oppression either by representation or by an appeal to arms. Now unequal to an unconventional warfare, waged by well-equipped and drilled European forces reinforced by the troops of the princes, these auxiliary powers found it no easy a task to assert themselves as by a natural process as they did in the past.

Not only did the princes mobilise their resources in support of British military operations against fellow-Indian powers but they

³⁸ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 270.

³⁹ Military Country Correspondence, 17 September 1792, Vol. 43, pp. 258 and 265-267.

⁴⁰ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 227.

⁴¹ Military Sundries, 13 August 1784, Vol. 66, p. 220.

granted complete discretion to the western power in the waging of war and making of peace. As their settlements did not provide for the sharing of the booty, if the war secured any, naturally it went to the benefit of the English and to the extension of their sway. In reality the alliance system followed by the rulers served as an intricate device, by which the rulers exacted the resources of the land and diverted them in aid of the foreigner for reducing the people to political subservience. As a result freedom was jeopardised and the economic progress was retarded. In short by 1799 the English had established their direct authority over an extensive region of South India—Coastal Andhra, Chingleput, Thanjavur, Dindigul, Ramnad, Coimbatore, Salem, Srirangapatnam, Malabar and Kanara and its influence over the entire territory extending from Kanyakumari to River Krishna. Strangers to the land, they superseded the princes, occupied the forts and assumed the collection of taxes in vast regions. All the prominent princes, with not a solitary exception, became instruments in foreign hands for the exploitation of their subjects and entered into complicity in total disregard to the national interests. No longer could the inhabitants look upon them as independent rulers, as guardians of their interests and defenders of their rights. This development devolved upon the poligars a new responsibility and a new mandate as the defenders of freedom.

Annihilation of Poligari System

Torn asunder by a strange dilemma created by the collapse of states and collusion of princes, what the inhabitants still retained was their internal autonomy in the village communities with the poligari system as a shield against encroachments. The efficient working of the poligari system appeared a dire necessity, more so under the changed circumstances, to prevent the westerners from going into conflict with the local institutions. Yet the alien power, ignorant of the political traditions of the land, took no note of this. On the other hand it considered the poligari as a formidable obstacle to the consolidation of its authority and made it its constant solicitude to liquidate it. In the Carnatic, when the Nawab ruled as the real sovereign, the English provided troops for the suppression of the chieftains but when he ceased to have any flicker of power, his interest waned and they proceeded on

their own. In the West Coast, particularly in Malabar, the Company offered financial rewards to the chieftains as baits for the surrender of their political authority.

For a full half century and more the British forces engaged the poligars in a long series of campaigns. In 1751 Captain Cope led the combined forces of the Company and Nawab Mohammad Ali against the poligars of Madurai, but unable to defeat them he withdrew.⁴² In 1755 George Pigot, the Governor of Madras, sent a powerful detachment to the far South. Colonel Alexander Heron, who commanded the operations, attacked the barriers, slaughtered the rebels and subdued the chiefs of Manaparai. The triumphant forces marched to Nattam, stormed the fort of Kovilkudi, massacred the Kallans⁴³ and carried off the brass gods from their temples.⁴⁴ The indiscriminate killing of the inhabitants and the plunder of temples threw the Kallans into frenzy. They boldly fell upon the enemy, returning the British atrocities with equally savage reprisals.⁴⁵ After suffering considerable loss the army moved to Tirunelveli. Determined to strike terror among the defiant chiefs, the forces butchered the entire population of Nattakottai, a stronghold of the rebels. Taken by complete panic, many of the chieftains surrendered.⁴⁶ However, the principal poligars, who appeared to have been the least perturbed, decided to continue their resistance. The poligars of Panjalamkurichi and Ettayapuram gained initial victories and repulsed the assault on their strongholds but eventually, weakened by a blockade, accepted terms.⁴⁷ In its subsequent operations the British force proved itself unequal to the task. Heron attacked the fort of Nalcantanseval, garrisoned by the armed men of Puli Tevar, the most conspicuous among the poligars of the western region of Tirunelveli and hero of many a battle. Though he commanded a small and ill-equipped force, he gallantly threw his columns into the fray and in a grim battle, marked by the display of brilliant strategy,

⁴² Thomas Saunders, 22 July 1751, Letter to Alam Khan, Public Country Correspondence, Vol. 4, p. 46.

⁴³ Mohammad Ali, 6 March 1755, Letter to Madras Council, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 3, p. 19.

⁴⁴ George Pigot, 16 September 1755, Military Consultations, Vol. 4, p. 156.

⁴⁵ Madras Council, 16 September 1755, Military Consultations.

⁴⁶ S. C. Hill, *Yusuf Khan*, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁷ George Pigot, 17 September 1755, Military Consultations, Vol. 4, p. 157.

administered a devastating blow to the enemy.⁴⁸ After sustaining this humiliation, the forces started on their return march to Tiruchirapalli. While they were manoeuvring across the hills of Nattam, the Kallans boldly fell upon the intruders and recovered their gods.⁴⁹ The reverses suffered by the British army undid what it gained in the first phase of its operations. The poligars, subtle as they were, united against the common foe, administered bribes to its avarice, when the circumstances warranted, procrastination to its passion to command, but soon after the forces withdrew from the field, repudiated whatever settlements they had accepted and retained their independence and influence unabridged. While these warlike leaders gained a new confidence in their tactics and strength, the inhabitants, experiencing the savagery of the westerners, developed an undying hatred against the English.⁵⁰

Undeterred by these reverses the Anglo-Saxons resumed their operations in 1756, when they sent a talented but rash general, Khan Sahib in command of a powerful expedition. The diabolic atrocities, that marked his encounters, struck so great a terror that the defiant chiefs were thrown into bewilderment. As resistance seemed futile, the chiefs accepted terms and agreed to pay tribute.⁵¹ In the following year, however, the poligars regained their influence, taking advantage of a rebellion organised by Maphuz Khan, brother of Mohammad Ali, with their support. This unexpected turn of events forced the Company to undertake more campaigns. In 1757 John Caillaud commanded an expedition to Tirunelveli, but unable to coerce the chiefs, returned.⁵² The situation turned favourable to the Company in 1761, when Khan Sahib gained a series of victories, which culminated in the occupation of the strongholds of Puli Tevar and the destruction of twenty-nine forts of the chieftains.⁵³ In the course of a determined struggle, he occupied Sattur, routed the Kallans, subdued Ettayapuram and

⁴⁸ Madras Council, Public Despatches to England, Vol. 19, pp. 85-87.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 19 June 1755, Military Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 206-7.

⁵⁰ W. Fullarton, 13 August 1784, letter to Madras, Military Sundries, Vol. 66, pp. 75-76.

⁵¹ Yusuf Khan, 4 May and 23 August 1756, letter to Madras, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 4, pp. 69-129.

⁵² Tatarapa Mudali, 29 May 1757, letter to Madras, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 5, pp. 110-111.

⁵³ Military Country Correspondence, 25 May 1761, Vol. 9, p. 58.

Kolarpatti and defeated the western poligars in the battles of Kalakondan, Wootamalai and Surandai. On the approach of the British forces the chief of Vadakarai fled to Nelcatansevvai in the territory of Puli Tevar. The triumphant enemy occupied Vadakarai and assisted by 12,000 men of Travancore, launched an attack on Vasudevanallur, the stronghold of Puli Tevar. When the siege was in progress this indomitable chieftain at the command of 3,000 of his men gallantly fell upon the assailants. Both sides suffered heavy loss in the grim battle that followed, after which the English forces withdrew in consternation.⁵⁴ However, in December 1760 the operations were resumed. Despite his attenuated strength, Puli Tevar charged the enemy, but finding it more formidable, withdrew. Khan Sahib now carried the trenches and opened a heavy cannonade from the summit of a hill. Convinced that the battle was lost, Puli Tevar accepted peace.⁵⁵ Though humiliated in the end, Puli Tevar was one of the most illustrious leaders of the period. Noted for his cool strategy, remarkable daring and organising ability, he distinguished himself as the architect of the poligar league, formed to fight the alien hegemony. Between 1763 and 1767 the Company wrested more victories. Major Preston subdued the western poligars of Tirunelveli,⁵⁶ while Captain Rumly in the course of two expeditions massacred 5,000 inhabitants of Melur and forced the Kallans beg for quarter.⁵⁷ Donald Campbell expelled the poligars of Ariyalur and Wodayarpalayam in Tiruchirapalli and reduced these districts to submission.⁵⁸ Major William Flint, commanding a force to Tirunelveli, sought the reduction of the poligars of Sivagiri, Ettayapuram and Panjalamkurichi but his endeavours were thwarted.⁵⁹ In 1767 a strong detachment led by Donald Campbell humbled the chiefs of Sattur, Sivagiri, Vasudevanallur and Singampatti.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Yusuf Khan, letter to Madras, received on 1 and 24 January 1760, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 8, p. 3 and pp. 42-43.

⁵⁵ Yusuf Khan, letter to Madras, received on 25 May 1761, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 9, p. 58.

⁵⁶ Robert Palk, 6 February 1764, Military Consultations, Vol. 20, p. 67.

⁵⁷ B. S. Ward, *Memoir on Madura and Dindigul*, Vol. 3, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁸ Robert Palk, 10 and 26 January 1765, Military Consultations, Vol. 22, pp. 31 and 64.

⁵⁹ Charles Bouchier, 27 January 1767, Military Consultations, Vol. 26, p. 417, and H. R. Pate (ed.), *Tinnevely District Gazetteer*, Vol. 1; p. 76.

⁶⁰ Charles Bouchier, 8 June 1767, Military Consultations, Vol. 26, p. 455.

In 1780 the poligars, determined as they were, defied British authority, by extending their aid to Hyder Ali in the Second Mysore War (1780-1784). The Madras Council, which was administering the Carnatic under the Nawab's assignment, took firm measures to counter the challenge. Colonel William Fullarton, whom the Company placed in command of a powerful armament, advanced to the *palayams* in 1783. He attacked Melur in Madurai and displayed such a ferocity that the inhabitants, though warlike, submitted and agreed to pay tribute.⁶¹ Advancing through the woods of Sivaganga, the invaders appeared in Tirunelveli. The rebels of Panjalamkurichi repulsed an assault made on their fort, but considering the insecurity of the broken citadel, evacuated it.⁶² Uniting against the aggressor, Kattabomman of Panjalamkurichi and Varaguna of Sivagiri assembled their irregular troops in the mountain recesses of the west, but the discovery of a secret path to their hideouts enabled the enemy to put them to flight.⁶³ The British forces now assembled at Srivalliputtur. Threatened with the destruction of the spectacular tower of the famous shrine of this town, the poligars of Tirunelveli submitted and agreed to pay tribute.⁶⁴ In 1790 when the Third Mysore War broke out, the chieftains again went into defiance. Colonel Maxwell now commanded the expedition. His victories over Kattabomman and Varaguna enabled the Company to reassert its influence in Tirunelveli.⁶⁵

In these interminable conflicts the poligars asserted themselves as an effective second line of defence to the country. They suffered reverses and agreed to pay the tribute, it cannot be denied; but freedom-loving as they were and commanding the support of their people, they displayed a remarkable ability to recuperate from their reverses and a will to reassert their freedom, whenever they saw opportunities.

The Anglo-Saxons, resolved to cripple the poligari system, took a more decisive step, when they induced Nawab Mohammad Ali

⁶¹ B. S. Ward, *Memoir on Madura and Dindigul*, Vol. 3, p. 9.

⁶² Tinnevely Book, September 1783, letter No. 41.

⁶³ William Medows, 10 July 1792, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 163, p. 2938.

⁶⁴ William Fullarton, 13 August 1784, letter to Madras, *Military Sundries*, Vol. 66, p. 71.

⁶⁵ Charles Oakeley, 7 September 1792, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 166, p. 4426; 9 October 1792, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 167, p. 4860.

to place it under their direct authority. The Fifth Article of the Carnatic Treaty of 1792 stipulated that the Company agreed to make collection of tribute from the poligars at its own expense and risk, to charge the Nawab neither the expense attending the collection nor any deficiency that might arise thereon. The Sixth Article provided that the English, desirous of preserving the Nawab's sovereign rights over the poligars, would engage to the utmost of their power and consistent with the realisation of tribute to enforce the allegiance and submission of the chiefs to the prince.⁶⁶ The implications of this settlement were quite detrimental to the working of the poligari system. The Company went beyond the normal course of action in gaining control over the chiefs, for they agreed to charge the Nawab neither the deficiency in collection nor the expenses attending the enforcement of it. If coercion were deemed essential, it agreed to do it at its own expense. Secondly, the Nawab lent his name to the Company for the suppression of the poligars, for it was left at liberty to interpret what action was needed to enforce allegiance and submission, vague as they were, to him. Armed with this authority, the English embarked upon a systematic extirpation of the poligari system in the Carnatic. This synchronised with the commission of similar excesses in the territories acquired from Mysore.

Between 1795 and 1799 several *palayams* were occupied. In 1795 the British forces marched on Ramnad, taking advantage of a conflict between this principality and Sivaganga, before Setupati Muthuramalinga Tevar anticipated any hostile move.⁶⁷ The Company occupied his capital, deposed and sent him prisoner to the Fort of Tiruchirapalli. A proclamation issued by the Madras Council decreed the British annexation of the territory.⁶⁸ The Setupati, as the ruler of the state and the guardian of the causeway to the sacred shrine of Rameswaram, commanded the veneration of the inhabitants. But the precipitate action, by which this ancient royal institution was suppressed, threw the population into indignation. In Manaparai-Dindigul region several chiefs were expelled from their districts. Lakshmi Nayak of Manaparai was deprived

⁶⁶ C. W. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties etc.*, Vol. 5, p. 236.

⁶⁷ Lord Hobart, 4 March 1795, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 338-340.

⁶⁸ S. Radhakrishna Aiyar, *A History of Pudukkottai*, p. 297.

of his *palayam* in 1795.⁶⁹ The Poligar of Palni, the guardian chief of the reputed temple of the hills, was imprisoned at Dindigul and his territory taken over.⁷⁰ On the pretext that the Poligar of Yerramkottai went deranged in his senses, the Company occupied his *palayam*. This was followed by the seizure of Mombarra. In Kumaravadi the ruling chief was deposed and his son installed.⁷¹ In 1796 the Company annexed Yerrevadoo, Sankampatti and Madoor in Dindigul on the plea that the poligars were of contumacious character.⁷² Kaumia Nayak of Sapatore was deprived of his territory and driven into exile.⁷³ In 1797 the *palayam* of Chennulgudi was occupied.⁷⁴ Two years later, in the course of a poligar rebellion in Tirunelveli the Company annexed Panjalamkurichi, Kadalgudi, Kulattoor, Sapatore, Nagalapuram and Yezhayirampunnai.⁷⁵ In the West Coast in Malabar and Kanara, the same policy of sequestration was ruthlessly enforced. The Company occupied the principalities of Kavalappara, Kottayattu, Palakkad and Kozhikode.⁷⁶ Many of the royal houses of Malabar maintained their political independence for over thousand years, but the British administration in violation of the agreements, which had been settled with them during the war with Mysore in 1790, reduced them to the status of mere land holders.⁷⁷ More of the chieftains met a similar fate upon the fall of Mysore. The poligars of Comlah, Vittel and Nileswaram,⁷⁸ and the Rajah of Anagundi, a descendant of the Emperor of Vijayanagar, too, were denied possession of their territories, which they held in former periods.⁷⁹

In 1799 the Madras Council confidently asserted that the power

⁶⁹ Board of Revenue, 31 August 1795, General Report to Madras Council, Vol. 2, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10 January 1796, General Report to Madras Council, Vol. 2, p. 95.

⁷¹ Ibid., 28 February 1797, General Report to Madras Council, Vol. 2, pp. 165-169.

⁷² Madura District Records, 4 August 1796, No. 1236, pp. 45-48.

⁷³ Board of Revenue, 12 October 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 299, p. 12344.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1 June 1797, Proceedings, Vol. 178, p. 3057.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12 October 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 299, pp. 12344-6.

⁷⁶ W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 519-524.

⁷⁷ K. M. Panikkar, *A History of Kerala 1498-1801*, pp. 409-410.

⁷⁸ Board of Revenue, 14 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 257, p. 6360.

⁷⁹ Madras Council, 7 August 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 1050-1058.

of the poligars was annihilated to such an extent that they were deprived of their power of resistance.⁸⁰ The *palayams* were sequestered, the forts built by them razed to the ground and the chiefs robbed of their authority. The Company assumed the military duties, which had been exercised by the poligars from the remote past, the collection of *deshakaval* and other established fees and deprived them of their right of retaining armed guards.⁸¹ These drastic measures, the sequestration of *palayams*, execution or expulsion of the chieftains, destruction of forts, deprivation of traditional rights, dissolution of the military and police establishments and assumption of the collection of fees, carried into effect vigorously, had excited adverse consequences. The people had no example of the extent to which such a severe policy had been carried into effect so ruthlessly.⁸² In disregard to popular sentiments and local traditions the aliens had subverted a time-honoured system of government, which had served a useful role for centuries. The inhabitants had for long been accustomed to sharing in the administrative authority in the *palayams* and to seeking employment in the poligari establishments. This opportunity became non-existent. The village communities had been left without any shield of protection against the illegal demands of armed parties claiming the authority of the *circar*⁸³ and the rigours of the administration had manifested in different forms because of British levies and demands. When the monarchies were transgressed and the poligaries destroyed, the westerners came into direct confrontation with the village communities; it was the collision of two divergent cultural systems—one of the Anglo-Saxon West, the other of the Dravidian East.

Violation of Village Autonomy

The violent proceedings adopted against the poligars and the far-reaching changes introduced in their wake had a reaction,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 29 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 99, pp. 3249-3256.

⁸¹ Ibid., 22 January 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, p. 21.

⁸² Board of Revenue, 21 November 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 240, p. 9628.

⁸³ Madras Council, 22 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 442-445.

detrimental to the retention of autonomy by the villages. The villages furnished the armed men for service with the chiefs. The slaughter of the peons and villagers, perpetrated repeatedly by the British forces spread a deep wave of revulsion across the country. The interminable campaigns waged by these intruders greatly expanded the military responsibility of the chiefs. In proportion to the increase of military obligation, the villages were forced to contribute more of their manpower and material resources to the poligars, leaving a trail of bankruptcy too heavy for the local establishments to shoulder.⁸⁴

Left free in the administration of local affairs by the princes in the past, the village communities played a key role in polity and society. Through their agency the assessment of revenue and collection of taxes had been made, justice administered and regulations enforced. When the collections had been made, they took one-fifth of the net produce, to be applied for the expenses of the local establishments.⁸⁵ However, a radically different situation developed with the assertion of British authority. The assumption of the direct collection of taxes, interference with the details of local administration and interposition of western judicial institutions and military tribunals in the land marked an encroachment upon the jurisdiction of the villages. To aggravate this development the Company in 1799 issued a proclamation directing the inhabitants to pay the *deshakaval* and other established fees, so long administered by the *patels* and poligars for the performance of police duties, directly to the British officials.⁸⁶ Added to these, it enhanced the demands and extended them to the bazaars, which had been left exempted so long.⁸⁷ Naturally the communities resisted but the aliens with wanton contumacy resorted to crude violence.⁸⁸ The Company employed the sword as the accepted method of deciding the issues, for it asserted, the presence of the military in the provinces was indispensable, it was the instrument

⁸⁴ Madras Council, 27 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257, p. 5678, and 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2941.

⁸⁵ Selections from the Records of the Collectorate of Trichinopoly, 1867, p. 34.

⁸⁶ Board of Revenue, 18 November 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 239, p. 9415.

⁸⁷ Secret Sundries, 14 August 1800, Vol. 21, pp. 1108-1110.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 24 June 1800, Vol. 21, p. 1045.

of enforcing authority and for keeping the inhabitants in constant threat of terror.⁸⁹

These malignant measures marked a blatant interference in the internal affairs of the village communities. Strangers to the customs and traditions of the local institutions, the Anglo-Saxons discarded all obligations involved in *deshakaval*. Instead of a boon and a source of service, as it had hitherto been, this institution was reduced into an instrument of exaction and harassment. Since then it not only created and preserved a constant source of foreign interference with the autonomy of the villages and the life of the people but was transformed from a reward given for protection into a contribution, made by the villages for the purchase of forbearance to oppression. The village communities found themselves deprived of their status and utility. This led to the break up of the social order which they so long nurtured and promoted.

Perhaps the British administration would not have encountered fierce opposition but for the reactive attitude of the population. The Board of Revenue reflected upon the sentiments of the inhabitants, when it asserted in 1799 that rude warriors, habituated to arms and independence, the inhabitants of the southern provinces displayed a remarkable tendency to unite together whenever a common foe threatened them.⁹⁰ The inhabitants of the western region of the Peninsula, the Malabar Commission declared, were of a high and martial spirit and appeared ready to fight any aggressor.⁹¹ In fact the chieftains, the poligars in particular, warlike and freedom-loving as they were, developed through their long struggle against the Britons a contempt for death and never hesitated to appeal to arms and violence in defence of their rights.⁹² In 1798 the Madras Council reported to the Court of Directors that it was impossible to dispense with the considerable number of troops, as the spirit of independence marked in a stronger degree the character of the chieftains of the southern provinces than in

⁸⁹ Madras Council, 22 January 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, pp. 18-19.

⁹⁰ Board of Revenue, 13 May 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, p. 4184.

⁹¹ J. Spencer, J. Smee and A. Walker, Report on the Administration of Malabar, p. 43.

⁹² S. R. Lushington, 13 December 1801, letter to the Board of Revenue, Tinnevely Records, No. 3579, p. 235.

Coastal Andhra.⁹³ These high-spirited patriots could no longer be idle and passive spectators to the march of events, that systematically undermined the dearest of their interests.

Intellectual Reaction

Thus within the space of a decade the Anglo-Saxons overwhelmed the balancing forces in the polity and threatened the independence of the country and rights of the inhabitants. Did the people cherish a political concept or develop a political awakening to enable them to cope with the challenge? History has recorded that in the dealings of the ruled with the rulers grievances are pursued nowhere when political awareness is negative, are pursued on paper when it is negligible, and are pursued to the field when it is considerable. Evidently a simple political philosophy guides the common people as to the implications of the political philosophers, who possessed a rare sense of perception to action for the redressal of grievances. Perhaps South India had no Voltaire and no Montesquieu to interpret political phenomenon in terms of pure reason, yet it cannot be denied that the age had political philosophers who possessed a rare sense of perception and vision in their analysis of the implications of developments. Their proclamations and letters hold out the high ideals, which guided the patriots in deciding their reaction against the shackles.

Nothing is more fantastic than what S. S. Furnell has asserted. In discussing the Vellore Mutiny he has declared that the English, though strangers to the soil, had commanded the loyalty of its sons. If national pride entered into native character, that obedience if yielded at all would have been yielded reluctantly. 'Generally, in India this feeling is anything but strong, and its place is occupied by a sense of benefits derived by the individual from the maintenance of the European supremacy, combined with somewhat indefinite, and perhaps superstitious feeling of respect for the people who, within the compass of a very brief period, have, as if by enchantment, become masters of an empire splendid beyond comparison with any other ever held in condition of dependency by a foreign state'.⁹⁴ In fact the common people, generally simple

⁹³ Madras Council, 15 October 1798, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 29, p. 409.

⁹⁴ S. S. Furnell, *The Mutiny of Vellore*, (Madras Record Office), p. 2.

in their living and insular in their outlook, could not have for long comprehended the serious implications of European intrigues in the Indian courts. Contented with the sphere of activity of the local institutions and considering the rulers as strangers to the soil, they seldom maintained any contact with royal courts during those days, when means of communication themselves were scanty. Merchants, as they were, the Europeans gave no ground for political suspicion and when they went to war with the auxiliary powers, they did it in co-operation with the forces of the princes and in the name of enforcing loyalty to the sovereigns. So successfully did they conceal their aggressive role under their legitimatist veil that the common people entertained no doubts. Long after they got themselves entrenched in the political sphere, the inhabitants understood the gravity of the situation.

The rebel literature on popular reaction is not only meagre but fragmentary. The insurgents exchanged messages from place to place, but for fear of detection they conveyed them generally orally. Letters written on palm-leaves were often sent, but there were instances, when they were destroyed on the approach of British troops and traitors. What is available is only limited information furnished by a few letters, proclamations which escaped destruction and were seized by the British and their spies, and the details revealed by the rebels in the course of interrogations. Though limited, they are significant as they give a clue to how the people interpreted the historical development brought in by British aggression. Official material on intellectual reaction to the political development too is scanty. The British administrators do not seem to have anticipated a popular resistance to their machinations. Besides, ignorant of the languages of the country and the customs and manners of the people, they remained strangers to the political thought of the inhabitants. William Fullarton, who led an expedition against the poligars of the South in 1783, however, had an opportunity to exchange views with the chiefs, in the light of which he had cautioned the British against disregard to the country's traditions. As an outcome of his deliberations with the leaders of the people, his impressions reflect the concepts, cherished by them. He warned in 1784 that the British proceedings against the rulers of the land had led to a general imputation by the inhabitants that they rudely violated the rights and honour of the

inhabitants, foes and friends alike, and that they had acquired territories through unjust means. He further admonished that the expedient repeatedly resorted to by the Company in exerting the military arm in the details of civil regulation was looked upon by the people as an egregious violation of all public trust and a total abrogation of all civil rights, for it declared aloud that no power prevailed but that of force.⁹⁵

It was left to Marudu Pandyan of Sivaganga, the greatest political thinker of the age, to analyse the factors that led to the political malady. He attributed it to four fundamental factors: the foolish policy of the princes, the calumny of one group of people against the other, the treachery of the English, and habitual submission of sections of people to authority. He condemned the rulers for entering into collaboration with the Europeans and subsequently accepting the humiliating status of subordination to the aliens. It is clear that he had studied and compared the behaviour of the princes, the attitude of the people, and the machinations of the Britons before any other patriot attempted a similar task in arriving at these convincing conclusions. He contrasted the disunity among the sons of the soil to the existence of unity among the Anglo-Saxons. The different powers of India fought each other, betrayed the best interests of the land with no understanding of the treachery of the westerners and assisted them openly or covertly in the establishment of their authority, he declared. Rightly, as he indicated, in Hyderabad Nasir Jang and Muzaffar Jang fought each other, in the carnatic Chanda Sahib and Mohammad Ali and in Thanjavur Pratap Singh and Sayaji. In Mysore the interests of Tipu and Krishna Raja Wodeyar came into conflict. Considerations of immediate relief drove the princes to the camp of the European powers and made them amenable to the alien nod. Acquisition of power marked a deliberate move against public faith, for the Company came for trade but through intrigues occupied territories. A Malabar letter reflected the same view, when it reprimanded a traitor for placing his trust in the English.⁹⁶ What contributed to the consolidation of the British sway was, as Marudu

⁹⁵ W. Fullarton, 13 August 1784, Report to Madras Council, Military Sundries, Vol. 66, pp. 241-250.

⁹⁶ Ezhambalam Kunjan of Cotiote, translation of an *olah* to Ganawadyat Achen, Diary of the Collector of Cotiote, p. 111.

Pandyan asserted unequivocally, the tendency of sections of the people to take orders from the whites and obeying them subserviently. He attributed this tragedy in their character to a want of perspective and a vision in grasping the magnitude of the threat, that they faced. Therefore he served a solemn warning to the people that if these suicidal trends continued, the whole of India would inevitably be reduced to British rule.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Revenue Sundries, 16 June 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 447-451.

CHAPTER II

EXACTION AND SPOLIATION

EQUALLY OFFENSIVE and abnoxious as political humiliation, was the economic exploitation, systematically pursued for long by the aliens. Ruthless merchants, as the English were, they looked upon with complacency the acquisition of large fortunes as the constant and proper motive of their political domination. Irregular proceedings, rigorously pursued either directly through their servants or indirectly in collusion with their allied princes, drained the resources of the land and infringed the social rights of the inhabitants. The patriots condemned the English for reducing the population to a deplorable state. Marudu Pandyan of Sivaganga denounced the westerners for exercising power quite arbitrarily, and for looking down upon the inhabitants as mean beings. So terrible was the havoc wrought to the economy of the villages, he declared that the people had to seek subsistence on mere water rather than on rice and subsequently perish.¹ Ezhambalam Kunjan of Malabar asserted: 'If we will compare former times, when the favour of the Gods Perumal and Bhagavathi and the gracious countenance of our rajah's family and the rightful sovereign spread their happy influence over us, with the times which have now come to pass we must bewail the difference, and say it is lamentable'.²

As votaries of mercantilism, the English allowed their greed to vitiate the ends of administration. They welcomed political authority as a handle to promote material glory of their homeland. The initial attitude was entirely commercial. The Company began trade and sought profits from the sale of the manufactures of India in the market of Europe before they dreamt of acquiring territories. To make the purchases they shipped bullion from England. When the territorial authority had been obtained, instead of abandoning mercantilism, they considered it a source of service in the promotion of their commerce. In the place of

¹ Marudu, Srirangam Proclamation, translation, Revenue Sundries, 16 June 1801, Vol. 26, p. 452.

² Ezhambalam Kunjan, palm leaf letter to Ganawadyat Achan, translation, Diary of the Collector of Cotiote for 1800, p. 110.

imported bullion, the Company diverted the territorial revenue for the purchase of goods in India for export to the West. Governor-General Cornwallis in consonance with this selfish policy declared that the real value of India to the British lay in her ability to furnish annual investment to Europe and to supply the pressing needs of the British in other regions.³ Thus a determination, so crude and cruel as it was, to rob the natives of their riches for promoting the welfare of the Englishmen continued to guide their basic outlook. Added to this, their policy of aggression and expansion demanded the maintenance of large military establishments and diversion of a major part of the revenue for wars. British expenditure shot up by leaps and bounds. As a result, the earliest British possessions were required to bear the brunt. Thus the inhabitants of these territories were called upon to support the trade overseas and aggressive wars in India and abroad. Directed by these motives the English gave no regard to the rights and interests of the people in the possession of their property and enjoyment of the fruits of their labour.

All the territories subjugated to the British rule and reduced to their influence experienced the baneful effects of an oppressive system. Ramnad, Dindigul, Chengleput, Coastal Anchara, Salem, Coimbatore, Malabar, Wynaad, Kanara and Soonda languished under the heel of the alien power and frequently witnessed the diversion of their economic potential for the support of Anglo-Saxon interests in India and abroad. The princes and poligars, who held possession of the rest of the country in South India, subjected to repeated demands for troops and resources, were required to serve as the mere instruments of the same system. The working of the engine of oppression assumed different manifestations and magnitudes in proportion to the impact that imperialistic greed and financial exigency created.

Oppressive Taxation

A steep upward revision of taxes constituted the direct method of oppression. This was widely applied in the territories acquired from Mysore in 1792 and 1799 and from the poligars at different times. Thomas Munro, Collector of Kanara and Soonda, in his

³ G. D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India*, 1961, pp. 51-52.

report to the Board of Revenue condemned Tipu Sultan's assessment in 1792 as extremely disproportionate to the actual resources of the land and quite injurious to the prosperity of the country.⁴ However, what he did was to shed crocodile tears, for soon after British control over the occupied territories had been consolidated, he and other administrators increased the taxes to unexampled heights. A settlement introduced in Dindigul in 1795 provided for the enhancement of taxes by twenty-five per cent over Tipu's assessment.⁵ In 1797 B. Hurdis, Collector of Dindigul, carried out further revisions—for Gudalur by ninety-six per cent, for Kambum eleven per cent and for Palni seventeen and a half per cent.⁶ In Kanara and Soonda, acquired from Mysore in 1799, Thomas Munro himself increased the land revenue by ninety-three per cent.⁷ In Salem and in the territories situated north of River Noyel the Company's settlement of 1799 showed a large increase of ninety-three and three fourths per cent over Tipu's assessment of 1792. Despite the ordeal of the peasants, Governor Edward Clive and his Council congratulated the collectors, Munro and Macleod, for their extraordinary merit of improving the Company's revenue from Kanara and Malabar.⁸ In Coimbatore, as a result of the marches and counter marches of the troops and plundering expeditions of the marauding free-booters, the villages suffered wholesale destruction of crops and plunder of the riches. 'This melancholy situation did not, however, deter Collector Hurdis from enhancing the land tax to a fantastic proportion of 118 per cent over Tipu's assessment of 1792.'⁹ In the territories annexed

⁴ Madras Council, 9 October 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7A, pp. 76-77.

⁵ Board of Revenue, 10 February 1795, General Report, Vol. 2, p. 29.

The theoretical claim of the Islamic State was usually fifty per cent of the crop. Tipu aimed at enforcing this claim, but the peasants really retained a higher share by keeping their cultivation concealed from the assessors or by bribing them. The British administrators not only enhanced rates but made frequent surveys to discover unnoticed cultivations. In consequence tax was made an intolerable burden. (Board of Revenue, 14 November 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 239, p. 9232).

⁶ Board of Revenue, 1 October 1797, General Report, Vol. 2, part 2, p. 13.

⁷ Ibid., 15 September 1800, General Report, Vol. 2, part 2, p. 114.

⁸ Madras Council, 9 October 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, pp. 78-79.

⁹ Board of Revenue, 15 September 1800, General Report, Vol. 2, part 2, p. 104.

from the poligars of Tirunelveli in 1799 the collections were raised to a quite arbitrary level of 117 per cent over the annual average assessment, made by the chieftains between 1792 and 1798.¹⁰ Not content with these, the Company instituted periodical inspections under the guise of gathering 'the most accurate information' of the remaining resources of the land. Attended with the upward revision of taxes, they created widespread apprehension in the country.¹¹ So great was the scare that these investigations spread among the peasants of Malabar that they refused to disclose any details on the state of agriculture to the traveller, Buchanan, when he visited the West Coast after the fall of Mysore.¹² The British administration in Chengleput and Ramnad frequently devised and ruthlessly applied different methods, calculated to squeeze the peasants of their wealth. It reduced the ryots' share of the produce, fixed exorbitant rates for grain in order to raise the levies in cash, curtailed the concessions enjoyed by the peasants under the princely regime and assessed the backyards of houses and other uncultivated lands—circumstances too numerous to mention—devised to harass the people in every possible way. In 1788 after these harsh regulations had been enforced, the Company directed the inhabitants to rent their villages for three years on a more oppressive assessment. When the ryots complained of the exorbitancy of it, the administration expelled them from their fields, confiscated the village lands and granted them to strangers.¹³ In December 1798 the peasants of the district groaning under tyranny, complained to the Madras Council that Collector Place not only caused their shares of produce, allowances and seed grain to be sold entirely in payment of the assessed taxes but levied contributions far exceeding the output from the fields. In a village where the total income was only 3,000 *pagodas*, they remonstrated, they were directed to pay so high an amount as 4,500 *pagodas*. As a result, they had to make good the payments 'by selling away all what they were possessed for in the world, and thereby they

¹⁰ Madura District Records, 1 August 1800, No. 1129, p. 193.

¹¹ Madras Council, 22 January 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, p. 21.

¹² H. F. Buchanan, *Journey Through Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. 2, p. 107.

¹³ Bundla Ramaswamy Naidoo, *Memoir on the Internal Revenue System of the Madras Presidency*, p. 22.

were entirely become ruined'.¹⁴ As the servants of the Company found themselves unequal to raising the assessed amount in full by corporal punishments, they illegally deprived the inhabitants of their proprietary rights on land and conferred them on those who agreed to pay their demands. Driven to desperate straits, a great proportion of the population abandoned their villages for leading a precarious life in the wilderness.¹⁵ In Ramnad a group of 739 villages yielded grain of the value not exceeding of 53,500 *star pagodas* in 1797-1798, yet the Company imposed quite a fantastic assessment for 71,629 *star pagodas*. The British servants not only forced the inhabitants to part with the entire grain, upon which they were to subsist for the complete year but rashly exacted even the remaining amount. This terrible measure was carried into effect at a time when the country had fallen into the grip of a famine, by stripping the villages of all their property—their cattle, ploughs and even utensils. So lamentable indeed was the fate of the people that many of them died of starvation or moved to other regions for refuge against tyranny.¹⁶

Equally miserable was the misfortune that overtook Malabar. The taxes fixed for plantations were so excessive that the peasants found them an unbearable burden. An amount of three *gold fanams* was the tax fixed for a pepper vine, half a *gold fanam* for a coconut tree and one quarter of a *fanam* for a betel nut plant. The average produce of the pepper vines throughout Malabar did not exceed three pounds per vine a year. Price of pepper during the last decade of the eighteenth century was estimated at 200 rupees per candy of 640 pounds; at which rate the price of three pounds or the average produce of a vine worked at 375 *reas*,¹⁷ but the tax levied for this very vine was five and a half *silver fanams* or 440 *reas*. At times the price of pepper fell to 125 rupees per

¹⁴ Madras Council, 22 December 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 92, pp. 5397-9.

¹⁵ Bundla Ramaswamy Naidoo, Memoir on the Internal Revenue System of the Madras Presidency, p. 22.

The English had claimed that Collector Place during his administration of Chengleput from 1794 to 1798 had effected much improvement in the administration of revenue (*Fifth Report*, Vol. 1, p. 195). But this was from the financial viewpoint of the Company.

¹⁶ Madras Council, 14 December 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 91, pp. 4440-5.

¹⁷ A rupee was exchanged for 400 *reas* and a *silver fanam* for 80 *reas*. Five *silver fanams* constituted a rupee in Malabar.

candy, at which rate the price of three pounds worked at about 234 *reas*, while the tax was nearly double the price of the total produce. Because of this tyrannical levy the peasants had to steal their own pepper, so that they could make a living and go on default of payment. The coconut trees were taxed at a rate so greatly above what they were able to bear that the land-holders disposed of the plantations either by sale or otherwise and no one substituted new plantations in their room, for they knew well that it could only prove an object of rapacity to the revenue administration and subject them to the possibility of further exaction.¹⁸ Added to this, the Company denied to the inhabitants their freedom to sell pepper except to itself at a price fixed at its mercy. The peasants rightly condemned it as negation of their proprietary rights on land and at times disposed of the products as they liked in defiance of the regulations or resorted to fraud and concealment. The seeds of future discontent and disturbance were sown in Malabar at a time when the influence of the Company was apparently gaining an ascendancy.¹⁹

Methods of Exaction

As could be expected, when reason and justice did not guide the British administration, it had to devise arbitrary methods and to rely upon force for the enforcement of its crude designs. The implementation of this policy assumed different manifestations. Firstly, the Company sold the right to levy and collect taxes to the highest bidders in public auctions. Determined to divert the entire material potential of the country for the destruction of the political power of Mysore, the English resorted to this questionable course of action during their administration of the Carnatic under the assignment and assumption, and Thanjavur under the assumption. No attempt was made to protect the inhabitants against the rapacity of the renters and no attention was given to the maintenance of irrigation projects.²⁰ Armed with unchallenged authority, these greedy intermediaries descended upon the innocent peasantry, robbed them of their riches, suppressed even the legiti-

¹⁸ Board of Revenue, 29 January 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 271, pp. 983-1003.

¹⁹ J. Spencer, J. Smee and A. Walker, 28 July 1801, Report on the Administration of Malabar, pp. 9-10.

²⁰ Madras Council 18 November 1791, Military Consultations, Vol. 154, p. 5678.

mate opposition and passed on the booty to their foreign masters. In the process they too amassed huge fortunes.²¹ Secondly, the administration misused its machinery for the realisation of its material ends. Thus in Malabar it utilised its tribunals in such a way as to encourage the inhabitants to prefer complaints against other people so that the confiscation of the latter's properties could be proceeded with and the peasants could be deprived of the benefits of their labour. In 1781 the Bombay Council directed the Commissioners of Malabar 'to secure under a regular administration of justice all those advantages to the Company, which their (Malabar districts) situation and valuable productions are capable of affording, both in revenue and commerce'.²² Thirdly, the English interfered in the succession of the chieftains to power with a view to obtaining rewards and presents for themselves. It was always the custom that when any of the poligars or zamindars died, no funeral ceremony was held until his heir succeeded him. If he had no heir, he would nominate his successor before his death and advised the latter to maintain cordial relations with his people. But by intrigues and interventions, the British promoted rivalries and exploited the situation so created for wresting large presents, giving no consideration to social and political rights of the chiefs.²³ Fourthly, the revenue servants, relieved of all restraints upon their conduct, frequently entered into collusion with the most influential inhabitants and gained their support, at times passive and at other times active, for the oppression of the peasants. Whenever this happened the burden of taxation fell heavily upon the weakest sections of the society.²⁴ Finally, the British servants resorted to violence for promoting exaction. They terrified the inhabitants, stopped cultivation and harvest until terms were agreed to, fastened the doors of the huts, turned the afflicted families out of their homes and tortured the innocent peasants at will. No exaggeration, the administrators sported with the miseries of the inhabitants, impoverished the country and grew rich with the spoils of injustice.²⁵

²¹ Military Sundries, 13 August 1784, Vol. 66, p. 218.

²² J. Spencer, J. Smee and A. Walker, 28 July 1801, Report on the Administration of Malabar, p. 9.

²³ Madura District Records, 7 March 1796, No. 1237, p. 15.

²⁴ Board of Revenue, 29 January 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 271, pp. 983-4.

²⁵ Ibid., June 1797, Proceedings, Vol. 178, p. 3057.

These excesses, objectionable as they were, had calamitous consequences. Fraud, peculation and corruption became so widely diffused that they rendered the British administration iniquitous and intolerable.²⁶ The country, that was once advanced in material glory and inhabited by an industrious people, was reduced to lamentable poverty by the end of the eighteenth century. The population dwindled. The inhabitants perished of starvation or fled to other regions which offered them shelter.²⁷

British Atrocities in Princely Territories

Equally pernicious was the system of arbitrary interference and illegal procedure, established and maintained by the English administration and its servants against the rights and interests of the inhabitants of the princely states. Benefited by the settlement of the treaties of defence and protection, the Company stationed troops in the states and exercised an overwhelming military and political control over South India. It utilised its influence to exact contributions from the princes, to ridicule their administration, when it so desired, and to violate the rights of the private individuals at its whim and fancy.

The Company corrupted the princely administration. Pressed by the exigencies of the times, when conflicts were frequent and financial demands great, it directed the princes and other chiefs to contribute money and provisions and to liquidate real as well as imaginary debts. In 1797 the chieftains of Tirunelveli complained to the Madras Council that the bribes, demanded by Collector Jackson, were so excessive that even with the sale of all their lands they would not succeed in raising even one-fourth of the total requisition.²⁸ Tormented by the magnitude of the demands, the princes exhausted all their resources for meeting them and sought to stave off the risk of losing their mantles of power. They too enhanced the taxes, relaxed the checks on arbitrary proceedings of their servants and appointed such task masters who could extract the maximum from the menaced

²⁶ Madras Council, 4 September 1801, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 110, pp. 1662-3.

²⁷ General Report of the Board of Revenue, 1797, Vol. 2, p. 165, and 1800, Vol. 2, part 2, p. 114.

²⁸ Board of Revenue, June 1797, Proceedings, Vol. 185, p. 5965.

population.²⁹ When this policy proved of no avail in fetching the needed funds, the princes raised huge loans on exorbitant rates of interest from the European creditors.³⁰

So callous was the disregard shown to individual rights that the white servants of the Company committed the crudest of outrages upon the villagers. The troops, stationed at different centres, forced the inhabitants to supply them with fruits, eggs, sheep and cattle, paying no compensation whatsoever or giving only a nominal price.³¹ When they were on march, they unhesitatingly seized the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle belonging to the villages.³² The British officers arrested the inhabitants, whenever the rival parties bribed them, compelled the ryots to cut grass for their cattle and horses without paying anything in return and levied forced labour for the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new houses. The withdrawal of workers from the fields and denial of any compensation for their labour not only retarded economic progress of the villages but set in a vindictive revulsion.³³ On the 13th of October 1798 the inhabitants of Nellore, unable to bear the rude behaviour of Captain Forbes, sent a complaint to the Nawab of Arcot. Though they could not obtain any redressal of their grievances, it presented the typical attitude of the whiteman to the inhabitants. 'One day he came into the mosque with his boots on and a dog with him at a time when the people were all assembled at prayers and desired the Musselmen to rise and make salams to him. The Musselmen told him it was not proper for him to come into the mosque with his shoes on and to bring a dog with him. Upon this he became angry and gave one man three violent slaps with his hand, that the man fell down senseless and having paraded through the mosque with his dog he went away first throwing the dog into the reservoir of water belonging to the mosque. The wall that surrounded the small mosque near *allybaug*, he demolished and put a stop to the reading of prayers and to the *circar's* announcing the times of prayers

²⁹ Selections from the Records of the Collectorate of Trichinopoly, 1867, p. 18.

³⁰ Military Sundries, 13 August 1784, Vol. 66, pp. 214-6.

³¹ Marudu Pandyan, 20 June 1801, letter to Agnew, Military Consultations, Vol. 26, p. 5340.

³² Report on the Administration of Malabar, 28 July 1801, p. 9.

³³ Military Country Correspondence, 13 October 1798, Vol. 49, p. 354.

therein, he intended to have had the mosque destroyed also, which was stopped by the arrival of Iftakhar ud Doula Bahadur (the *amildar*), about one hundred houses of the poor and the ryots in front of his own house of residence he has broken down to make a large open area, he stands upon his upper-roomed house to look to other people's women and when he sees any of them he casts stones into the houses from a sling and when he is in liquor he loads firelocks with small shots and fires them off under the pretence of shooting sparrows.³⁴ The consequences of such high-handedness forced even Umdut ul Umara, Nawab of Arcot and an ally of the Company, to declare: 'My people degraded my revenues impoverished and my country ruined that Commanding Officers, their *Dubashes* and servants reap the harvest of their oppressions and grow rich in the spoils of their injustice'.³⁵

To facilitate an easy take-over of the allied states the English sought to weaken the influence of the princes and to humiliate their officials. They looked upon the subjects of these rulers as the scapegoats of their imperialistic fury. In the Carnatic, Thanjavur and different *palayams* the Company's administration imposed restrictions upon the inhabitants in their dealings with the *circar* offices. If they attended the offices of the princely administration, they were dragged from their homes, flogged at market places, thrown into military captivity and deprived of possession of their property.³⁶ The inhabitants, who purchased provisions from the stores of the princes, were frequently scourged and imprisoned.³⁷ Crimes were attributed to the servants of the Rajah of Thanjavur, fines were levied on them and were put in confinement in an attempt to expose the unreality of princely authority.³⁸ In 1797 the British servants forbade the ryots of Tirunelveli from cultivating the fields of the chieftains and directed them to confine their work to their own villages. This abnoxious restriction not only violated the established practice but seriously curtailed the employ-

³⁴ Inhabitants of Nellore, *mahazar* to the Nawab of Arcot, Military Country Correspondence, 13 October 1798, Vol. 49, p. 354.

³⁵ Nawab Umdut ul Umara, 24 June 1800, letter to Edward Clive, Secret Sundries, Vol. 21, p. 1058.

³⁶ Secret Sundries, 14 August 1801, Vol. 21, pp. 1108-1110.

³⁷ Madras Council, 20 May 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 268, pp. 2996-9.

³⁸ Military Country Correspondence, 29 October 1798, Vol. 49, p. 321.

ment opportunity at a time when it was very limited.³⁹ The princes, languishing under British control, found it beyond their ability to prevent these outrages and hence stood themselves ridiculed among their people. Among their subjects this intolerable development spread gloom and despondency, too difficult for them to bear.

The imperial and racial policy of the Anglo-Saxons further curbed the employment opportunities of the inhabitants. In the past they could obtain positions in the military or police and civil establishments of the princes, poligars and village communities and rise in position according to their ability. But the Company drastically reversed this trend. It liquidated the princely establishments in the occupied territories, inducted its own armed forces in the allied states, dismantled the poligari system and obliterated the local institutions.⁴⁰ The western establishments had offered an opening to the inhabitants for seeking a career but the administration of Governor-General Cornwallis, influenced by ulterior considerations, decided to exclude the Indians from all high positions. A conviction of the racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxons, a low opinion about the Indian character, an anxiety to reserve all lucrative jobs to the Britons and a determination to hold the former ruling classes in constant humiliation led the Company into this course of unwarranted action.⁴¹ This racial and discriminatory policy denied to the sons of the soil every path to distinction and shut them out of every avenue to fortune. The Board of Revenue reported to Madras Council that the inhabitants, finding themselves excluded from all opportunities for bright career, became so restive that they concluded that armed struggle offered the sole remedy to this degrading situation.⁴²

Country Business

Harassed by the British demands for money and provisions and failing to extract them in full, the princes, particularly the Nawab of the Carnatic, raised huge loans. The European creditors advanced money liberally. Bearing an interest of thirty-six to forty-eight per cent they became highly speculative investments. When the Nawab

³⁹ Board of Revenue, 25 May 1797, Proceedings, Vol. 178, p. 2915.

⁴⁰ Board of Revenue, 15 September 1800, General Report, Vol. 2, p. 117.

⁴¹ Tara Chund, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 1, pp. 298-302.

⁴² Board of Revenue, 10 October 1801, General Report, Vol. 3, p. 116.

went in default in the liquidation of the debt with interest, he found himself constantly besieged by large crowds of clamorous creditors. The princes sought to extricate themselves from embarrassment by resorting to the destructive practice of granting *tuncaws* or assignments of revenue.

The assignees now stepped into the place of *circar* servants in the administration of revenue.⁴³ Their vexatious management, as Governor-General Cornwallis himself had admitted, served as a continual cause of the most aggravated calamities to the inhabitants of the Carnatic.⁴⁴ Money-lenders, accountants, managers and servants, who began to swarm every part of the country, now engaged themselves in a pestilential traffic called 'country business'. They collected taxes from the people, who fell victims to their jurisdiction, and exorbitant rates of interest on the loans that they advanced. The British administrators readily extended protection to these adventurers either out of favour or in return for periodical payments.⁴⁵ The rigorous system, raised by these trigger-happy Europeans, threw the other forms of tyranny under a shadow. In their endeavour to amass the largest fortune in the shortest period they, by means of every kind of torture, extorted the property under various pretences from the helpless and devoted victims of their cruelty and avarice.⁴⁶

The adventurers proceeded in the following way. They employed a large number of badged peons as guards of their houses under the pretext of protecting the money-chest. The peons addressed the whiteman 'master'. The well known badge exacted and enforced the most implicit obedience. These masters issued warrants, arrested the inhabitants, who fell in default of payments, and placed them in confinement.⁴⁷ When the season of collection arrived, their armed guards sallied forth, scourged and oppressed the wretched peasants and made off with the spoils of exaction.⁴⁸ If the people proved dilatory in their payments, the peons seized

⁴³ Military Sundries, 13 August 1784, Vol. 66, pp. 214-6.

⁴⁴ E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 188.

⁴⁵ Madras Council, 7 February 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 177-183.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31 October 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, pp. 756-7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 442.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 180-3.

them immediately and after placing them in strict confinement under the guard, allotted for the protection of the treasure, inflicted upon the miserable victims 'all the odious and unmanly punishments and tortures, that unrestrained malignity and avarice can invent'.⁴⁹ The most piercing cries and groans of agony of these unfortunate people disturbed the silence of nights in the towns but evoked no sympathy of these Europeans, which even the most obdurate human mind would have been constrained to give.⁵⁰

These usurers also assisted the engine of exaction in the princely administration. Eager to satisfy the demands of their imperial masters, the rulers granted the maximum discretion to the *amildars* in the collection of taxes. The Europeans advanced loans to the *amildars* in proportion to the latter's ability to exact taxes. Enabled to become independent of the immediate produce of the land, the administration wearied the peasants in their resistance to extortions, for if they did not submit to the demands, they were threatened with still heavier loss, which they would certainly sustain by the exposure of ripe grain to the ravages of weather and robber gangs. In this way the price of grain too was kept excessively high much to the benefit of the Europeans, for the latter collected taxes and interest in kind and kept it stored, waiting for opportunities to sell.⁵¹ No wonder Captain Macaulay concluded: the entire country fell a poor victim to 'the machinations of interested and unprincipled individuals, who have fattened on the spoils of artificial famine, in the extorted wealth of the people and in the wreck of public prosperity',⁵² and was reduced to a 'deplorable state beyond which it can hardly sink lower'.⁵³

Disruption of Industry and Trade

The South manufactured a large variety of finished goods and commanded a considerable volume of trade, inland and foreign.

⁴⁹ Captain Macaulay, letter to J. Webbe, Secret Consultations, 27 January 1800, Vol. 10, p. 182.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26 February 1800, letter to Madras, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 206.

⁵¹ Madras Council, 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 408-410.

⁵² Captain Macaulay, 7 February 1800, letter to Madras, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 185.

⁵³ Ibid., 26 February 1800, letter to Madras, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 206.

The manufactured articles ranged from the primary agricultural implements to fine silk fabrics, intended both for internal consumption and foreign market. Textile products, which included calico, muslin, table cloth, napkins and red cloths, were made in abundance at Ramnad, Pudukkottai, Madurai, Thanjavur and Kanchiveram. The weavers sold the coarse variety, usually dyed, in the local market and exported the finer variety, painted in the colours of gold and silver, to the foreign countries.⁵⁴ Iron ore, gathered from the beds of streams, was smelted for the manufacture of agricultural implements. Salt was obtained from sea-water at Tutukudi. Among the cottage industries were carpentry, pottery, oil crushing and paper and gunny making.⁵⁵ Carts and boats were built. There were boat building yards at Pulicat, Kozhikode, Surat and Goa.⁵⁶ Trade in staple cotton, broadcloth, silk products, carpets, pearls, glassware, chinaware, salt, copper, horses and camels offered large profits to the merchants. Pioneers in maritime enterprise, the inhabitants of the coastal towns employed large vessels for overseas trade. Laden with goods, their boats frequently visited Nagore, the principal emporium of the East Coast, Tutukudi, Tondi, Karaikkal, Nagapatnam, Musulipatnam, Kozhikode and Goa. The growing industries and a beneficial trade offered employment to a large section of the population and contributed to material advancement.⁵⁷

However, since the establishment of British influence this bright situation began to change adversely. The manufacturing industries ran into difficulties. Trade dwindled in volume, ports declined in traffic and merchants found their task insecure. The political disorders that came in the wake of European aggressions, destruction of the established polity, canalisation of the internal manufacture for keeping the western market well supplied and the exploitation of political authority for the commercial advancement of the English rendered this sordid spectacle inevitable.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Manuscripts in the Archives of Pondicherry, No. 201.

⁵⁵ B. S. Ward, *Memoir on Madura and Dindigul*, Vol. 3, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Tara Chund, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 1, p. 178.

⁵⁷ Madras Council, 4 October 1799, Public Consultations, Vol. 239, pp. 3621-9.

⁵⁸ Report of the Board of Trade, Public Consultations, 14 April 1800, Vol. 243, pp. 1095-6.

The repeated military operations led to stagnation of traffic and dislocation of industry. In times of war the English pressed into their service carriage bullocks of the entire districts for keeping their forces well supplied with provisions. This brought the internal movement of goods at a standstill in times of war.⁵⁹ On the high seas the western vessels competed with the boats of the coastal merchants. Whenever hostilities broke out the inhabitants of the affected territories kept their cumbersome effects buried in the ground and fled to the most unfrequented hills with small loads of grain to lead a miserable existence. If the conflicts continued beyond the period for which they had provisions for subsistence or if the troops and robbers deprived them of what they had, they perished of hunger. As clashes were frequent and as the settled groups were the most susceptible to these ravages, the manufacturers fell an easy prey to the turmoils.⁶⁰

The threat to the growth of cottage industries of the South came from three sources—the trade of the Company, private trade of its servants and manufacture by imitation in England—all sheltered by political supremacy. In 1769 William Bolts had observed: 'The whole inland trade of the country, as at present conducted, and that of the country's investment for Europe in a more peculiar degree, has been one continued scene of oppression: the baneful effects of which are severely felt by every weaver and manufacturer in the country, every article produced being made a monopoly, in which the English with the *banyans* and black *gomashtas*, arbitrarily decide what quantities of goods each manufacturer shall deliver and the prices he shall receive for them.' The agents in the pay of the Company registered the names of the weavers in its book and forced them to accept what was offered as the price and to work for nobody else. If the weavers refused to accept the granted rates, they were tied by their girdles and flogged and if were detected as selling to others they were 'seized and imprisoned, confined in irons, fined considerable sums of money, flogged and deprived, in the most ignominious manner of what they esteem most valuable, their caste'.⁶¹ In a bid to restrict internal consumption through inflated prices and compel the weavers to sell the

⁵⁹ Madras Council, 6 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, p. 4782.

⁶⁰ M. Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, part 1, p. 191.

⁶¹ William Bolts in his 'Consideration of Indian Affairs' quoted in Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 1, pp. 366-7.

goods only to the Company, its administration in Salem and Coimbatore imposed a stamp duty on every piece of cloth sold in public bazaars. If it were suspected that the weavers attempted to evade the payment of duty, the peons forcibly entered their houses and confiscated all that was valuable. The weavers complained that no other tax annoyed them more, yet their entreaties fell on deaf ears. In consonance with their policy, the English continued to exercise their political authority in support of their exploitation of the local industries and for the promotion of their own material benefits.⁶² Secondly, the private trade carried on by the public servants of the Company totally eclipsed local industries and commerce. In gross violation of their obligations to the ruled, the British servants obtained possession of the products of the land at the rates fixed by them, much below the market rates, and sold them without paying the taxes. The local merchants, purchasing the goods at the market rates and selling them after paying numerous taxes, found their situation quite untenable. If they yet presented any serious competition, the Englishmen with no hesitation whatsoever forced them to withdraw from the field either by the levy of fines and presents or threat of corporal punishments. At times goods of the local merchants were stopped on the highways and carried off. Thus through violent and abusive proceedings, the English eliminated internal competition to their private trade.⁶³ Thirdly, the industrial practices adopted in England presented serious problems to the promotion of sale. The country commanded a reputation in the manufacture of the finer varieties of textile products. However, by the end of the eighteenth century most of them were imitated by the British textile industry and sold under the South Indian label in foreign markets. Though the super-fine varieties of calico remained beyond imitation, the British products in their unbleached form made no distinction apparently from the genuine South Indian goods, but they lost their colour and lustre on exposure. As a result the entire market came to be glutted and even the genuine products of South India could not be sold. Denied of any protection against external competition in the wake of British political ascendancy, the manufacturing community and

⁶² Madras Council, 9 May 1800, Public Consultations, Vol. 244, pp. 1415-21.

⁶³ Military Country Correspondence, 13 October 1798, Vol. 49, p. 354.

the dependent sections of the population found the odds insuperable. The stagnation of industry and trade threw a large section of the settled population into unemployment and uncertainty.⁶⁴

Famine and Embargo

With a shattered economy the country appeared susceptible to the worst horrors of any calamity, caused by the vagaries of nature. This came in 1798. In November 1798, when a few partial showers came, the peasants saw the fairest prospect of a good harvest and to rectify the loss sustained by them due to the exactions in the previous seasons. With a happy expectation that their labours would be amply rewarded, the starving ryots sowed the seed grain. This pleasing scene, however, was soon dreadfully reversed: for with the exception of the early but scanty showers not a drop of water fell afterwards. Rivers and tanks went swiftly dry, the plants withered away and the fields put on so dreary an appearance that could be imagined in an excessive drought.⁶⁵ In Ramnad, for instance, large tracts of territory, which were under cultivation could be traversed without presenting to the view even the trace of any vegetation. Every kind of crop perished, so also the seed grain. According to the Board of Revenue the desolation wrought by this terrible drought appeared so melancholy to the eye as to be beyond belief.⁶⁶ The spread of this famine reduced the southern region of the Peninsula to a sad plight. Grain vanished from the market, stocks in store houses went exhausted and the inhabitants were exposed to total starvation and death. Mass exodus followed and multitudes thronged to the delta of the Kaveri, but there too grain disappeared.⁶⁷ The English obtained supplies from the northern regions of India to feed their troops, but left the inhabitants to reap the ordeal, brought in by their moral irresponsibility, political manouvre and economic adventurism.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Madras Council, 18 March 1801, Commercial Despatches from England, Vol. 14, pp. 31-42.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 14 December 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 91, pp. 4428-4441 and Board of Revenue, 7 February 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 244, p. 984.

⁶⁶ Madras Council, 14 December 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 91, pp. 4391-4396.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 6 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, p. 4613.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 13 August 1799, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 5, p. 323.

What served as the last straw on the camel's back were the inhuman tactics put into force by the Anglo-Saxon assignees and administrators. Even in times of plenty, when the country was overflowing with grain, it was a practice with the European usurers to compel the ryots to part with their grain and to form themselves into monopolistic combinations for raising the prices. Now greedy to take the full benefit out of the natural calamity, they put into operation all the nefarious tactics in their scandalous traffic. Combining with all the unscrupulous adventurers of their category against the hungry and dying population, they gained a complete monopoly of trade in grain and raised the prices intolerably high.⁶⁹

In their struggle to survive the famine, the peasants sought to bring food grain from the northern regions, but this too was resisted. The British forces had seized the carriage bullocks to be employed in their war against Mysore, causing a total stagnation of the internal traffic.⁷⁰ The other avenues too could not be attempted as the servants of the Company intensified the forcible collection of excessive duties on grains, laboriously brought in head loads from remote regions.⁷¹ As a last resort, the inhabitants sought to bring food grain from foreign territories by employing their vessels but the British administrators of the far South, Powney and Jackson, enforced an embargo on imports. To create an artificial demand for the rotten grain, kept stored in the British warehouses, and to sell them at an enormous price, the English quite ruthlessly interdicted the importation of grain. Applied to the East Coast, situated south of Thanjavur and the worst affected by the famine, this terrible measure afforded the readiest means of raising the return from the sale of the unmarketable grain but it reflected the Anglo-Saxon disregard to the pathetic lot of the people and their readiness to exploit even the saddest human tragedy for their material advancement.⁷²

⁶⁹ Madras Council, 31 October 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, pp. 756-8.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 27 March 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 251, p. 1845.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, pp. 4781-8.

⁷² Board of Revenue, 26 January 1798, Proceedings, Vol. 192, p. 505, and Madras Council, 15 October 1798, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 6, pp. 300-302.

Violation of Custom—Rebels' Charge

The arbitrary procedures of the Company's administration and European adventurers presented a challenge of great magnitude to the rights of economic welfare of the population. As the patriots branded the English usurpation of political authority as the violation of faith they equally forcibly condemned the British atrocities against their economic and social rights as the violation of custom. This charge marked the invocation of a traditional political concept to cope with the ominous development in the economic sphere. To the patriots, in the absence of anything better, faith and custom constituted the twin foundations of good government. William Fullarton, a colonel in British service, had declared as early as 1784 that there was no evil more dreaded by the inhabitants than innovation and no duty more sacred with them than the observation of custom.⁷³ When empires were rising and falling and oppressive rulers were emerging in quick succession nothing appeared to guarantee the preservation of peoples' interests against administrative oppression in a greater degree than what the custom or *mamool* enjoined, for any innovation portended public encroachment on people's rights.

The excesses, systematically perpetrated by the English in their public as well as private roles and in their collective as well as individual capacities alienated from their influence all the powerful sections of the community—the peasants, artisans and officials. Oppressive taxation and abnoxious extortion turned the peasants against their rule. Levy of exorbitant duties on merchandise and exploitation of political authority for material advancement embittered the feelings of the merchants and the manufacturers alike. The obliteration of princely and local establishments and the induction of racism in the administrative services antagonised the sections, who by tradition sought public careers. To all these major groups violation of custom, which being a general term, meant the violation of what they held sacred, their established rights.

The patriots left the British under no illusion and doubt about what they felt. The people of Kanara recalled their glorious past, when the taxes were fixed and demands moderate. Wherever

⁷³ W. Fullarton, 13 August 1784, Report to Madras, Military Sundries, Vol. 66, pp. 245-250.

Thomas Munro, the Collector, went, they sent to him what he described a 'Bill of Rights', asserting their customary rights and refusing to make any compromise on custom in the payment of taxes. But the British refusal to accede to their demands left the ryots restive.⁷⁴ The poligars had entertained a conviction that they could never get justice from an administration, that followed a policy of harassment and violence.⁷⁵ In 1797 an anonymous letter warned the Company that the inhabitants considered the withdrawal of the ryots from their fields and the imposition of forced labour upon them by the foreign intruders, for the purpose of breaking old houses and erecting new houses for their captains and collectors, as the very violation of every principle of justice.⁷⁶ Marudu Pandyan, exasperated irreconcilably, condemned in more assertive terms the outrageous policy of the aliens. In his letter to the Madras Council he declared that the English in total disregard to public welfare and happiness entirely depended upon crude and oppressive means in their imposition of arbitrary assessment upon the peasants and exaction of taxes at excessive rates. It was essential to give the inhabitants that share of produce which was due to them by virtue of their right, and to honour their interests. It would contribute to the diffusion of public good. He warned the western power that the administration must be limited by custom. The established customs guaranteed happiness to the people and they must not be violated with impunity. Neglect of the principles of justice and inattention to custom in the British administration reduced the inhabitants to agony and distress.⁷⁷ However, the arrogant imperialists ignored the solemn admonitions.

⁷⁴ Board of Revenue, 28 August 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 261, pp. 7430-1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1 March 1798, Proceedings, Vol. 196, p. 1700.

⁷⁶ Board of Revenue, 28 September 1797, Proceedings, Vol. 185, pp. 5964-5.

⁷⁷ Marudu Pandyan, letter to Edward Clive, Revenue Consultations, 24 July 1801, Vol. 110, pp. 1405-6.

CHAPTER III

ADVENT OF REGIONAL LEAGUES

GREATLY AGITATED at the political malady and economic tragedy and languishing under the western heel of oppression and princely hand of collusion, the inhabitants rallied to the standard of resistance. Popular bitterness, that grew in volume as well as intensity, reached so acute and so serious a phase in the last decade of the eighteenth century, that it manifested itself in an extensive and powerful reaction. At its initial stage it was marked by the formation of regional leagues, organised and led by popular leaders or traditional chiefs. Between 1795 and 1799, in consequence, an alignment of political forces directed against the British sway came into existence. The alliance system was not unfamiliar to the people, but it assumed an unprecedented magnitude as it found itself confronted with a powerful challenge, wielded by an unconventional enemy. It cannot be denied that local grievances and personal disaffection too played their natural role in the organisation of the defiant leagues, yet what was remarkable was that the leaders never allowed them to blur their vision. Exalted political ideals served as the driving force of the entire movement.

Marudu and the Ramnad League

The leaders of Sivaganga, Ramnad and Madurai, who had entertained a long tradition of independence and struggle against the forces of imperialism, spearheaded the formation of the anti-British alliance system. Marudu Pandyan, often called the *Sherogar*,¹ the most conspicuous among them and the political strategist of this movement, initiated and assumed the leadership of this league of the patriots. Dark in complexion, he had a handsome personality and was of affable manners. Born in obscurity, he by sheer dynamism and devotion to his ideals rose to eminence not only as the undisputed leader of Sivaganga but the central figure of the entire alliance system. A man of the

¹ Sherogar was a military servant but in Sivaganga the word was applied to the minister.

masses, he combined in himself organisational ability and political vision. The genius of young Marudu manifested itself, when he led a popular resistance, directed against the British and Carnatic forces, which occupied Sivaganga in 1772. After a bitter conflict he expelled the invaders and restored the possession of the state to its early royal house. In recognition of his service he was appointed the principal minister. So great was his popularity that he commanded the implicit loyalty of his people. Despite the exalted position he held in the state, he lived in an open house, unattended by any guard, and whosoever desired to visit him had a free ingress and egress.² The British administration made no public demand on Sivaganga except the normal rent of one-third of its revenue and took no measure, calculated to cause any embarrassment to his position or to give any mortification to his person.³ Yet deeply stirred by patriotic fervour, he decided to champion the cause of liberty: he promoted a rebellious spirit, aided the insurgents in other quarters and as the English themselves had asserted, endeavoured to the utmost of his power to subvert the foundations of the British Empire.⁴

He patiently analysed the political trends of the times and clearly foresaw whither India was drifting. A great nationalist, he declared rightly that because of European treachery, princely betrayal and popular indifference, the English had reduced a large

² J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

³ 'As a betel bearer young Marudu, known as Chinna Marudu, entered the service of Rajah Muthuvaduganatha Tevar of Sivaganga. He gained reputation as a talented organiser and leader of popular resistance, directed against the forces of the English Company and the Nawab of Arcot, which occupied the state in 1772. When the prince was killed in an action with the British forces at Kalayarkoil, Velu Nachiar, the widow of the fallen ruler, and Vellachi, his daughter fled to Dindigul for asylum. Chinna Marudu and his elder brother Vella Marudu joined the royal house in exile. Before long the Marudus returned to the forests of Sivaganga and organised a rebellion. In 1780 when Hyder Ali embarked upon a war against the English, Marudu with his armed hordes attacked the forces of occupation, liquidated the Nawab's authority and re-established the uprooted royal house. Vengum Peria Wodaya Tevar, who married princess Vellachi, was elevated as the ruler of Sivaganga. He appointed the Marudus as his ministers in recognition of their services to the state.' (K. Annaswamy Aiyer, *Sivaganga Zemindary*, 1899, Introduction, pp. 3-4).

⁴ Board of Revenue, 2 July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 289, p. 7697.

⁵ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 1 June 1801, No. 3579, p. 2.

part of the country to political slavery and if this ominous trend was allowed to be sustained, the freedom of the entire Jambu Dweepa would be completely annihilated. He appealed to all sections of the population to unite immediately and fight till the destruction of alien sway was attained.⁵

The proud and independent people of the southern districts of Tamilnadu, annoyed at the violation of their rights and customs by an administration that was foreign, arrogant and oppressive and denial of supplies by an arbitrary embargo, appeared determined to jump into any fray aimed at the overthrow of the British power. What the indomitable Marudu proceeded to do was to send numerous emissaries on missions to the headmen of the villages and the poligars of the districts with a message of rebellion.⁶ This daring venture, undertaken in the face of serious odds and hostile military presence, received a welcome response. Melappan, Singam Chetty and Muthu Karuppa Tevar, the popular leaders of Ramnad, and Gnanamuthu, an influential chief of Thanjavur accepted the leadership of the Sherogar.⁷ The inhabitants of Madurai particularly the warlike Kallans transformed themselves into active rebels.⁸ In the western region of Tirunelveli Mappila Vannian, described as a popular and daring leader and the son of the Poligar of Sivagiri allied themselves with Marudu.⁹ Thus a league of the rebels with Marudu Pandyan as the central figure came into existence. In the eastern region of Tirunelveli, Vira Pandya Kattabomman of Panjalamkurichi took an active interest in the rebel cause more than any other leader and proceeded to organise a league of the poligars.¹⁰

Among the leaders of Ramnad, who accepted the alliance system of Marudu, Melappan was the most influential and turbulent. He started his career as a peon in the irregular militia of the deposed Setupati. As he organised opposition, the English

⁵ Revenue Sundries, 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 447-9.

⁶ Board of Revenue, 13 June 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 229, p. 4891 and Ibid., 19 October 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 299, p. 12605.

⁷ Madras Council, 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7754.

⁸ Board of Revenue, 2 May 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, pp. 3818-22.

⁹ Bishop Caldwell, *Tinnevelly*, p. 178 and Tinnevelly Records, 23 March 1801, No. 3579, p. 88.

¹⁰ Board of Revenue, 13 June 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 229, p. 4891.

seized and threw him into prison but he escaped to Sivaganga, where he received shelter and inspiration from Marudu.¹¹ Reaching Tiruchirapalli, where the deposed Setupati had been imprisoned, he stayed in disguise, established a secret communication with the imprisoned chief and opened a correspondence with the villages of Ramnad. After a bold but futile attempt to work out the escape of Setupati from prison, he returned to Ramnad and circulated palm-leaf letters, directing the villagers to pay no taxes to the Company, relieving them from its jurisdiction¹² and exhorting them: 'What was past is past, that they would at least in future avoid paying such attentions which would please them (the English)'. In response to his appeal the inhabitants of numerous villages refused to pay taxes and prevented the servants of the Company from surveying their land.¹³

As the hostilities with Mysore broke out on the 5th of March 1799, the Company withdrew its troops from the southern provinces. The rebels, utilising this opportunity, plundered the enemy's stores and equipped themselves with fire arms and seized food grain for feeding the famished homes. In April and May 1799 there broke out isolated disturbances, not as part of the larger design of insurrection but with a limited objective of strengthening the rebel league.¹⁴ Bodies of armed men led by Melappan, Muthukaruppa Tevar and Singam Chetty attacked the British posts and stores at Abiramum, Komeri, Mudukulattur, Chikel and Kokekulam.¹⁵ The English, however, moved against the rebels with promptitude. In April 1799 Tichborne, who commanded the Company's troops, surprised the rebel camps. In an action at Komeri he defeated the insurgents and dispersed them.¹⁶ A detachment of Major Bannerman pursued the fugitives to their retreats and in a battle at Palamaneri killed Singam Chetty. The head of the rebel chief was cut off and impaled at a conspicuous spot at Komeri, while the heads of his followers in the villages

¹¹ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 7 March 1801, No. 3579, p. 67.

¹² Board of Revenue, 2 May 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, pp. 3782-6.

¹³ Amildar of Palamaneri, 26 April 1799, letter to Lushington, Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 226, pp. 3815-6.

¹⁴ Board of Revenue, 27 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, p. 3822.

¹⁵ Ibid., 6 and 13 May and 3 June, 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, pp. 3959 and 4185 and Vol. 228, p. 4675.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, p. 3822.

were making a calculated bid to deter the patriots from joining the league.¹⁷ The inhabitants now returned to apparent loyalty. The simultaneous and extensive attacks made by groups of armed men on isolated British posts and the care taken to get away with fire arms revealed the real designs of the rebels.¹⁸ S. R. Lushington, the Collector of Ramnad, wrote to the Madras Board of Revenue: 'The sudden and extensive nature of the attacks in which the inhabitants suffered no malestiation bespoke something more serious than the common depredations of plunderers, and the anxiety shown to get possession of the muskets of *sibbendy* peons indicate a higher object than the acquisition of little plunder'.¹⁹

Kattabomman and Tirunelveli League

Vira Pandya Kattabomman, Poligar of Panjalamkurichi, belonged to a line of chiefs who fought repeatedly against the English, though he was essentially a man of peaceful disposition.²⁰ Yet, two factors in particular influenced him in the organisation of the poligars against the Company. They were: the inspiration, that he received from Sivaganga and the humiliation that he suffered at the hands of the English.

The rebel missions that Marudu Pandyan sent to Tirunelveli visited Panjalamkurichi. This led to the establishment of 'close association between the chief of Panjalamkurichi and the rebel league of Ramnad. Since then Vira Pandyan held frequent consultations with Marudu. On the 1st of June 1799 he, attended by 500 of his men, reached Palamaneri with the idea of going to Sivaganga for a meeting with the Sherogar.²¹ Collector Lushington considering it as a step taken in direct contempt of the authority

¹⁷ Madras Council, 11 June 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 253, p. 3248.

¹⁸ Board of Revenue, 2 May 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 226, pp. 3774-5.

¹⁹ S. R. Lushington, 25 April 1799, Letter to Board of Revenue, Board Proceedings, Vol. 226, pp. 3774-5.

The *Sibbendy* peons were the irregular troops, employed normally for the collection of taxes.

²⁰ London of the Company's service in Ramnad has described Kattabomman as 'an ignorant man of a peaceful disposition, incapable of managing the affairs of his pallam' and Jackson has characterised him as 'a dissipated young man, without any education but of a peaceful disposition'. (Revenue Consultations, 2 October 1798, Vol. 88, p. 3088).

²¹ Board of Revenue, 10 June 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 229, pp. 4853-4.

of the Company, conveyed his serious apprehension.²² As it was of importance to avert a clash with the British arms at a time when the organisation of the league was in a nebulous state, the Poligar halted at Palamaneri and waited for the arrival of the emissaries of Sivaganga. On the 5th a party, sent by Marudu, reached Palamaneri and the two rebel groups held deliberations. Subsequently, joined by 500 armed men of the Sherogar, Kattabomman returned to Panjalamkurichi.²³ The details of their consultations are not known, but this meeting indicated the importance that the leaders gave to mutual consultations in the organisation of rebellion.

Colin Jackson, the corrupt and arrogant Collector of Ramnad, was entrusted with the collection of tribute from the poligars. In September 1798 as the tribute from Panjalamkurichi fell in arrears, Jackson in his characteristic rashness wrote letters to Vira Pandyan in a language of reprehension and remonstrance. As the country had been hit by a severe drought, the Poligar found it impossible to pay the tribute regularly.²⁴ Thereupon the Collector asked for the authority of the Board of Revenue to employ force for punishing the chieftain in an exemplary manner. However, practical considerations prevailed upon the Board to refuse sanction. The Company had already withdrawn its forces from Tirunelveli, to be employed in the war against Mysore, in consequence of which it found it impossible to undertake a military venture. On the other hand if it applied an insufficient force, it feared the possibility of a long predatory warfare with the poligars.²⁵ On the 28th July 1798 Jackson again reported that Vira Pandyan trifled with his authority. In reply the Board instructed him to summon the latter to his office at Ramnad. Accordingly on the 18th of August 1798 Jackson despatched an order directing Vira Pandyan to attend at Ramnad within two weeks. As defiance, unaided, seemed unwise, the poligar decided to comply with the summons. Now he received reports that on the 21st of August Jackson had left Ramnad on a tour of the Tirunelveli district.²⁶ When the Collector arrived at Tirukuttalam, Kattabomman attended by his retinue,

²² Ibid., 10 June 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 229, p. 4859.

²³ Ibid., 13 June 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 229, pp. 4883 and 4891.

²⁴ Madras Council, 27 September 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, pp. 3084-3093.

²⁵ Ibid., 12 October 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, p. 3206.

²⁶ Ibid., 27 September 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, pp. 3084-93.

reached there on the 27th, but was told that he could see the former at his next halt at Chocumpatti. Upon arrival at that place, he was informed that he could see the Englishman at Sivagiri, then Sattur and then Srivalliputtur. Kattabomman waited at all these places, but was ultimately told that he could get an interview only at Ramnad. This intemperate attitude of Jackson appeared in strange contrast with how he treated the other poligars, for he permitted all of them including the minor chieftains to see him and pay tribute.²⁷ Despite this humiliation, mortifying as it was, Kattabomman accompanied Jackson for 23 days in a journey of 400 miles through the latter's route and reached Ramnad on the 19th of September. An interview was permitted on the 20th. Denied of seats, Kattabomman and his *vakeel* Sivasubramania Pillai had to stand before Jackson for three hours together. On an examination of the records, the Collector was convinced that the arrears of tribute amounted to 3,310 *pagodas* on the 31st of May 1798 and that the Poligar had already cleared most of it by the 31st of August, leaving only 1,080 *pagodas* in balance.²⁸ Yet he arrogantly directed Kattabomman to stay on inside the fort. A few sepoys now appeared apparently to arrest the chief. Immediately, Oomathurai, (the deaf and dumb brother of Vira Pandyan) who was keeping a constant watch over the proceedings from an unnoticed corner, ran out and by his usual signs, characteristic of the deaf and dumb, spread an alarm among his followers waiting nearby. Losing no time, the armed men assembled and carried their chief off.²⁹ At the gate of the fort of Ramnad there followed

²⁷ Kattabomma Nayak, 25 September 1798, letter to Madras, trans. Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, pp. 311-3113.

²⁸ A few Tamil writers have declared that Kattabomman refused the payment of tribute (T. N. Subramanian, *Kattabommu*, p. 97 and N. Sanjivi, *Manamkatha Marudu Pandyan*, p. 13). Bishop Caldwell too held the same view (*Tinnevelly*, p. 173). But this assertion is far from the truth. In fact, Vira Pandyan was not so rash as to invite a certain doom through the refusal of the payment, when the rebel organisation appeared weak and the enemy remained strong. Kattabomman himself had written to Edward Clive: 'I prepared money, for the payment of the *kist* and when I intended to set out against my health, Mr Jackson came to Tirukuttalam, which place I reached with the money in full for the payment of the Company's *kist*'. (Jagavira Ravivarma Kattabomma Nayak, 25 September 1799, trans. of letter to Clive, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, p. 3111).

²⁹ Board of Revenue, 11 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 224, p. 3070.

a clash, in which Lieutenant Clarke and a few others were killed. Vira Pandyan escaped but Sivasubramania Pillai was taken captive.³⁰ As any rash adventure seemed foolish, the Poligar now addressed letters to Governor Edward Clive, professing loyalty to the Company, in accordance with the principles of procrastination, which the chieftains frequently resorted to in critical times.³¹ He attributed the scuffle at Ramnad to the rashness of Jackson and requested the release of Siva Subramania Pillai.³² The Madras administration, too, did not desire to risk a conflict, because of its preoccupation in Mysore. Edward Clive issued a proclamation inviting Kattabomman to submit to the Company. In the event of surrender he assured a fair investigation into the Ramnad incident but in case of refusal he warned the Poligar of the serious displeasure of the government.³³ To remove all causes of suspicion and dissidence on the part of Vira Pandyan, he suspended Jackson from office and released Sivasubramania Pillai from confinement.³⁴ Responding to this gesture, the Poligar appeared before the Committee of Enquiry consisting of Lieutenant Colonel Brown, Lieutenant Colonel Oram and John Casmayor, appointed by the Madras Council, at Ramnad on the 15th of October 1798.³⁵ The Committee of Enquiry upon a thorough investigation into the circumstances which culminated in the clash at Ramnad, concluded that the treatment of Kattabomman was attended with unusual rigour and humiliation and condemned the conduct of Jackson as unnecessarily harsh and severe. Vira Pandyan was acquitted of all the charges, but was required to make provision equal to

³⁰ Madras Council, 27 September 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, pp. 3113-3119.

³¹ *Panchatantra*, the ancient book of apologues, suggests the sound alternative of procrastination in all critical times on the ground that by gaining time the chances of success are greater. In accordance with this principle the chieftains, particularly the poligars, whenever they found themselves unequal to the task of dealing with the enemy, begged pardon and even agreed to surrender.

³² Madras Council, 2 October 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, pp. 3111-8.

³³ Ibid., 13 October 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 89, pp. 3213-4.

³⁴ Madras Council, 12 October 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 89, pp. 3219-20.

Jackson was finally dismissed from office on charges of mismanagement of the affairs of the Company in the southern provinces.

³⁵ Ibid., 21 December 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 92, pp. 5416-7.

the salary of Clarke, who was killed in the scuffle, for the support of the latter's family.³⁶

However, Kattabomman had no intention whatsoever to honour a settlement with the enemy. What he wanted was to gain time to strengthen himself against the Company. The employment of British forces against Mysore and the organisation of rebellious alliances in other quarters presented the awaited opportunity. No difficult task faced Kattabomman in the organisation of a league; for the poligars of Nagalapuram, Mannarkottai, Powally, Kōlarpatti and Chennulgudi had already formed themselves into a combination against the English for the assertion of their *kaval* rights in Ramnad.³⁷ What Vira Pandyan proceeded to do was to join this league, to assume its leadership by virtue of the influence he commanded through the force of his character and financial resources. Determined to strengthen this league, he persuaded the headmen of Sapatore³⁸ and the Poligars of Yezhayirampunnai, Kadalgudi and Kulattur to join it.³⁹ In August he sent Sevatiah, Vira Pandya Nayak and Virabhadra Pillai on a mission to Elavarasanur and won the alliance of the Kallans.⁴⁰ Measures were taken to safeguard his interests and to provide against the enemy gathering information of his secret moves. He sent Pandiah Pillai, the brother of Sivasubramania Pillai, to Madras to gather and transmit intelligence about the Company's military movements⁴¹ and placed guards at different places to watch the Europeans and their agents.⁴² Despite the organisation of the league, it appeared weak. For Kattabomman gave importance to gaining the support of the poligars, while he ignored the common inhabitants and alienated the villagers by his exaction of taxes at rates higher than what they were accustomed to pay.⁴³

³⁶ Ibid., 1 March 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 94, pp. 554-561.

³⁷ Board of Revenue, 13 June 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 229, p. 4891.

³⁸ Madras Council, 6 December 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 99, p. 3321.

³⁹ Board of Revenue, August 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 231, p. 2905.

⁴⁰ Madras Council, 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2771.

⁴¹ Ibid., November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2716.

⁴² Ibid., 24 September 1798, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 88, pp. 3121-3.

⁴³ J. F. Kearns, *Panjalamcouchy Polegar and the State of Tinnevely*, pp. 19 and 23-24.

Tirunelveli League in Trial

Events now moved to a crisis. In August 1799 the son of the Poligar of Sivagiri, an ally of both Marudu and Kattabomman, and his adviser Mappila Vannian visited Panjalamkurichi. They held consultations and decided to establish their influence in Sivagiri, as the ruling chief of this territory refused to join the alliance. Added to this, as Panjalamkurichi being situated in an open plain appeared vulnerable to the hostile forces, the possession of a firm stronghold was considered a real necessity. The strategic location of the fort of Sivagiri at the foot of the mountains of the west and the barriers around rendered it eminently suited both for offensive and defensive operations. Major Gramme of the Company's service had rightly pointed out that Kattabomman's '... design in marching peons against Sivagiri is to get possession either by force or treachery of that fort and a narrow Pass which leads to it, difficult of passage, where he hopes to stand his ground against the force which his fears naturally suggest to him will be sent to punish him'.⁴⁴ Thus in a bid to strengthen the Tirunelveli League an armed column consisting of the followers of Kattabomman, the son of the Poligar of Sivagiri and several chiefs allied to them, led by Dalawai Kumaraswami Nayak, advanced to the west. As the Poligar of Sivagiri was a tributary to the Company, the Madras Council considered it as a challenge to its own authority and ordered the movement of the forces against the rebels.⁴⁵

It is clear that Kattabomman committed no serious offence against British authority as to provoke any violent reprisal. Though the Poligar of Sivagiri paid tribute to the Company, as provided by the Carnatic Treaty of 1792, he was not its subject but was of the Nawab of Arcot. So the right of intervention in a conflict between two subjects fell within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Nawab, but not of the Company. The son of the Poligar of Sivagiri, as a member of the alliance, served as a party in this venture and no complaint was preferred by the father against the son. Still the English decided to employ force against Vira Pandyan

⁴⁴ S. R. Lushington, 21 August 1799, letter to Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 231, pp. 3903-4.

⁴⁵ Madras Council, September 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 97, pp. 2418-20.

in disregard to the Nawab's sovereignty. This was because more than any other leader of consequence Kattabomman received the serious attention of the Madras Council, not only due to the complaints preferred by Jackson but also because of the investigation ordered by it into the Ramnad incident. More than this, the Company waited for an opportunity to suppress the poligars, thereby to execute the positive instructions of the Court of Directors that 'all subordinate military establishments should be annihilated within the limits now subject to our dominion'.⁴⁶ Free from the military operations against Mysore, which ended in complete victory early in May 1799, the British administration found it opportune to carry the directive of the Court of Directors into effect. Evidently the violent procedure against Kattabomman represented a definite attempt to enforce an already formulated policy of the Company, aimed at the liquidation of the poligari system, taking advantage of an opportunity created by the co-operation of the defiant league with the rebels of Sivagiri for gaining possession of this fort. It was not aimed at the suppression of any rebellion, for there was neither any blatant defiance of British authority either by Kattabomman or any other member of his league, nor any rash refusal of the payment of tribute, for any such precipitate step at this moment portended a certain doom.

In May 1799 Lord Mornington issued orders from Madras for the advance of forces from Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur and Madurai to Tirunelveli. The troops of the servile Rajah of Travancore joined the enemy.⁴⁷ Major Bannerman, armed with extensive powers, assumed the command of the forces. The Madras Government gave him this instruction: 'The rebellious conduct of Catabomanaig (Kattabomma Nayak), Poligar of Pandalamcourchy (Panjalamkurichi) having rendered it necessary to equip a military force for the purpose of suppressing the commotions excited by him, the Right Honourable Governor General (Lord Wellesley) has resolved to avail himself of this opportunity to carry into effect the orders of the Honourable Court of Directors for disarming the whole of the Southern Poligars and for reducing those irregular chieftains to the authority of the Civil Government. . . . The first

⁴⁶ Madras Council, 13 August 1802, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 118, p. 2690.

⁴⁷ Madras Council, 28 May 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 253, p. 3031,

object of your attention is to attack the Fort of Pandalamcourchy and to dispossess those inferior Poligars who have connected themselves with Catabomanaig in the present defiance of the Company's authority and in the exercise of independent power, contrary to his allegiance'.⁴⁸

Advancing through Ramnad the Company's detachment encamped at Tirunelveli. On the 1st of September 1799 the Major served an ultimatum, directing Kattabomman to attend on him at Palayamkottai on the 4th.⁴⁹ The Poligar tactfully replied: 'As I am a person thinking to be ever submissive to the Honourable Company, and obey their orders, there is no hesitation to attend on you, and obey your commands, but there is no lucky Day at present, when there is, I will attend and obey your orders. . . .'⁵⁰ The letter was no doubt submissive but evasive. It is clear that he was not prepared either for surrender or resistance. To that extent it represented a departure from his earlier attitude of professed loyalty to an evident disregard to the conflict that seemed certain.

As the sudden appearance of troops caused considerable alarm among the poligars and as surprise was of necessity for a quick victory, Bannerman by forced marches reached Panjalamkurichi. At day-break on the 5th of September all the troops assembled before this stronghold. The fort, an irregular parallelogram, 500 feet long and 300 feet broad was constructed entirely of mud and had square bastions and short curtains.⁵¹ The enemy cut off the communications of the fort and routed a body of armed men who rallied from the villages and sought access. Ramalingum Mudaliar, whom Bannerman deputed with a message asking for surrender, which the Poligar rejected, gathered the rebel secrets. He reported to the British camp that there was a wide breach in the bastion east of the main gate of the citadel, that no preparation had been made to barricade the inner part of that gate and that the fort itself was guarded by about 1,200 to 1,500 men only. On the

⁴⁸ J. Webbe, 19 August 1799, Instruction to John Bannerman, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 389-390.

⁴⁹ Madras Council, September 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2705.

⁵⁰ Kattabomman, 2 September 1799, a palm leaf letter, trans., Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2706.

⁵¹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 62.

basis of this report, which indicated that the rebels never anticipated this expedition, Bannerman decided his strategy of assault.⁵²

The plan of operation appeared well co-ordinated: the flank companies with a six pounder were ordered to blow open the south gate, field pieces to cover the storming party and a combined detachment of the Company and Ettayapuram to attack the north face of the fort. The signal for assault being given, a heavy cannonade broke open the gate by stages. The storming party advanced with order and resolution, but in the bitter contest that ensued, they found themselves unequal to the task. The troops of the Poligar, directed by Oomathurai, held their ground with determination and threw back the hostile columns. Restored to order, the assailants made a second yet more resolute endeavour but were again repulsed. So gallant was the resistance offered by the rebels that successive attacks were repeatedly thwarted.⁵³ Sustaining heavy losses and overwhelmed with despondency, Bannerman wrote to Madras Government: 'The attempt was persevered in so long as there was a shadow of success and never was European energy more gallantly displayed than by the officers on this unfortunate occasion. . . .'⁵⁴ To extricate itself from this humiliation, the enemy ordered the arrival of reinforcements and on the 6th fresh troops from Palayamkottai reached Panjalamkurichi. As the broken citadel appeared vulnerable, the besieged evacuated it and directed their course to Kadalgudi.⁵⁵ In a battle at Kolarpatti the Company's troops killed several of the fugitives and captured Sivasubramania Pillai prisoner. The British detachment followed up its gains with the occupation of Nagalapuram and other strongholds of the Poligar League of Tirunelveli.⁵⁶ Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman, the Rajah of Pudukkottai, captured Kattabomman from the jungles of Kalapore and handed him over to the enemy.⁵⁷

⁵² Madras Council, 22 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2777-85.

⁵³ Panjalamkurichi Azhivu Charithira Kummi, palm leaves No. 82-86 and Madras Council, 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2706-11.

⁵⁴ Bannerman, 5 September 1799, letter to J. Webbe, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2706-11.

⁵⁵ Madras Council, 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2713-8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2724-33.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2795.

He reported to Collector Lushington with real pride: 'On every side in the mountains I had placed my people to find out the hiding place of Kattabomman. He, Oomathurai, his two brothers-in-law and three others were surrounded at Kalapore on the borders of Sivaganga and caught. When Kattabomman was seized, he wished to have slain himself, but my people having bound his hands kept him in confinement.'⁵⁸

Kattabomman—An Early Martyr

Bannerman brought the patriots to an assembly of the poligars and after a mockery of trial sentenced them to death. Soundara Pandyan of Nagalapuram was executed at Gopalapuram and Sivasubramania Pillai at Nagalapuram on the 13th of September. The body of Sivasubramania Pillai was paraded through the streets of Panjalamkurichi and his head severed and piked on a bastion of the fallen citadel.⁵⁹ On the 16th of October Vira Pandyan was tried before an assembly of poligars, summoned at Kayattar. As a real patriot with a contempt for death, he boldly admitted the charges levelled against him: he asserted that he did send an expedition to Sivagiri and engage the British forces in the battle of Panjalamkurichi. Thereupon, as it was expected, the English commander announced the extreme penalty of death. Vira Pandyan was taken off and executed at a conspicuous spot near the old fort of Kayattar on the 17th of October. Never before had the great patriot displayed his nationalistic pride in so unexampled a degree as he did in the last but tragic moment of his life. Overwhelmed by awe, Bannerman wrote to Madras: 'It may not be amiss here to observe that the manner and behaviour of the Poligar during the whole time of his being before those who were assembled yesterday at the examination, which took place, were undaunted and supercilious. He frequently eyed the Etiapore (Ettayapuram) Poligar, who had been so active in attempting to secure his person, and the Poligar of Sivagiri with an appearance of indignant scorn, and when he went out to be executed, he walked with a firm and daring air and cast looks of sullen contempt on the Poligars to his right and left, as he passed. It was reported to me that in his

⁵⁸ Tondaiman, 24 September 1799, letter to Lushington, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 235, pp. 8069-70.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2741-7.

way to the place of execution he expressed some anxiety for his dumb brother (Oomathurai) alone; and said, when he reached the foot of the Tree, on which he was hanged, that he then regretted having left his fort, in the defence of which it would have been better for him to have died'.⁶⁰

Kattabomman, Soundara Pandyan and Sivasubramania Pillai together with many of their comrades at arms became the early martyrs of the anti-British movement. Cool and calculating, the patriots tried apparent submission and deliberate evasion so as to risk no conflict with the British military might at a critical time, as it had been in 1799, when they could anticipate aid neither from Mysore nor from any other quarter. But their tactics failed, defeating for the time being the fulfilment of their endeavour. The enemy followed up the execution of the leaders with the implementation of a radical policy, aimed at spreading a feeling of terror among the inhabitants and liquidating those factors that contributed to the organisation of the alliance system.

When Vira Pandyan was led off for execution, Bannerman addressed the assembly of the chiefs, which was summoned to witness the enactment of the tragedy. He administered a severe warning against any further defiance of the Company's military might. He declared in assertive tone that what had happened would convince them and their posterity that whatever be their rank no one of them would escape from punishment, if they acted in contempt of the English authority. Thereupon he dismissed the spell-bound assembly, that had listened to his admonition in fear and dismay.⁶¹ The relatives of Kattabomman were thrown into prison at Palayamkottai. Among them were his brothers Oomathurai and Sevatiah.⁶² The Poligars of Nagalapuram, Ezhayirampannai, Kolarpatti and Kulattur were captured and imprisoned at other places.⁶³ Not satiated with these retaliatory steps, the Company enforced more repressive measures: it deprived the members of the League of all their possessions, not only as a

⁶⁰ Bannerman, 7 October 1799, letter to J. Webbe, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2877-82.

⁶¹ Madras Council, October 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2883-4.

⁶² J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 51.

⁶³ Madras Council, 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2797-2804.

punishment for their part in the organisation of the alliance but also as a deterrent to others from participating in any future move, directed against the Company,⁶⁴ compelled all the inhabitants to surrender fire arms with no compensation whatsoever being paid and prohibited them from manufacturing such weapons on pain of death. The chieftains were forced to destroy their barriers and forbidden from employing armed men in their service.⁶⁵ Detachments were posted at centres of disaffection in an attempt to keep the inhabitants in constant fear.⁶⁶ These vigorous measures were matched with the liberal rewards given to the loyal chiefs. The Tondaiman of Pudukkottai was presented with a horse and an ornamental attire in acknowledgment of his meritorious services.⁶⁷ The Poligars of Ettayapuram,⁶⁸ Maniachi and Mailmunda, who assisted the military operations against the League, were granted possession of the villages belonging to Panjalamkurichi.⁶⁹ These were calculated not only to strengthen the forces of treachery in the country but also to keep the people in mutual suspicion.

The drastic measures, though were aimed at the annihilation of the spirit of independence and power of resistance, produced disastrous consequences. The leaders were executed or condemned to ignominious imprisonment and the villagers were deprived of the means of repelling the predatory incursions, common during this period. High-spirited, the inhabitants found it impossible to compromise with the iniquitous restrictions imposed with unequalled rigour in the wake of the suppression of the poligars. The repressive policy in consequence prepared the minds of the people for a more determined struggle.

Gopala Nayak and the Dindigul League

The movement had in Gopala Nayak of Dindigul its greatest diplomat. Poligar of Virupakshi and hero of many a battle, he engaged the invading forces of the Company for long. In 1783

⁶⁴ Madras Council, 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, p. 2766.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 22 January 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8 November, 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2864-75.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2796-7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 8 November 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 98, pp. 2948-9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24 July 1801, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 110, pp. 1379-80.

when Colonel Fullarton led the British troops to Dindigul, the south-eastern district of Mysore during this period, Gopala Nayak threw himself into the fray and made a vigorous but futile resistance to aggression. In 1792 the Company established its administration in the district, as it was ceded by Mysore. Since then Gopala Nayak, as a clever strategist, observed the strictest conduct of regularity in the payment of his tribute but secretly entered into intrigues with the disaffected leaders and strove hard to shake off their loyalty to the Company.⁷⁰ The policy of harassments enforced by the British administration for the collection of tribute, presents and provisions, dispossession of estates from the chiefs, the influence of Tipu Sultan and the close connections that had existed among the poligars through marriages and other relationships served as factors that helped in forging the ties of comradeship against the European power.⁷¹ Repeated deliberations, frequent conferences and exchange of visits marked the organisation of the Dindigul League. The mountainous terrain of this region, largely free from hostile observation, appeared wonderfully suited for frequent meetings to formulate rebel designs.

The initiative taken by Gopala Nayak in the organisation of an anti-British alliance, as the Madras Board of Revenue had observed, raised the hopes of the numerous chiefs and other inhabitants, who were longing for freedom. He deputed his emissaries to the disaffected leaders of Dindigul, Manaparai, Kallarnadu, Coimbatore and Salem. In 1797 he established a close alliance with Lakshmi Nayak of Manaparai and Yadul Nayak of Delli. This formed the nucleus of the Dindigul League.⁷² These chieftains decided to fight the Company's authority and to assist each other in their struggle. Gopala Nayak stationed Somnath Pillai as his representative at Delli for the purpose of constant communication.⁷³ At the instance of Yadul Nayak, the Poligar of Mangalam visited Delli and consented to join the alliance.⁷⁴ As a result of their repeated and determined endeavours the chieftains of other regions too rallied to the common cause. Among them

⁷⁰ Board of Revenue, 1 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2743-5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 21 January 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 217, p. 594.

⁷² Ibid., March 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2844.

⁷³ Ibid., 29 May 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 252, pp. 4044-5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5 March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 275, p. 2554.

were Poojari Nayak of Deodanapatti,⁷⁵ the chiefs of Dharapuram, Kangeyam, Columbum, Sankagiri and Karur,⁷⁶ the Poligar of Kanniwadi in Dindigul and the headmen of Ratnagiri and Nattam in Manaparai.⁷⁷ The chieftains of Periapatti, Metranti, Mewadi, Tondamuttur, Tengaivady, Ayotaripatti, Vedampatti and Soman-dorai followed suit.⁷⁸ In March 1799 Lakshmi Nayak visited Virupakshi and Kanniwadi and held conferences with the leaders. This was followed by the posting of resident-*vakeels* by the Poligars of Nattam, Ramagiri and Kadawoor at Virupakshi.⁷⁹ Subsequently, Arumugham Sherogar, at the instance of the allied chiefs, visited Kadawoor, Virupakshi and Ediankottai. The chieftains of these places visited each other and all together held a conference with Lakshmi Nayak. After this meeting was over, Lakshmi Nayak proceeded to Srirangapatnam, perhaps at the direction of the League, to request succour from Tipu.⁸⁰ On the 4th of April 1799 four *hircarrahs* of the Sultan reached Dindigul with presents to the rebel chiefs.⁸¹

The missions sent by Gopala Nayak, which were well received, had contributed to the formation and consolidation of a powerful alliance. The peasants joined the rebel standard. The British administration enlisted the service of the disbanded peons of Mysore to counteract the League's activity but with little success.⁸² The records pertaining to the formation of this League, as in the case of other alliance systems, do not furnish details of the machinations and conspiracies of the rebel elements; for obviously they were conducted in the thicknesses of the woods in complete secrecy. B. Hurdis, the Collector of Dindigul, in his report to the Board of Revenue has admitted that it was difficult to trace the mazes of rebel intrigues but it was certain that the chieftains cherished anti-British designs in common and in full confidence and their

⁷⁵ Madras Council, 6 December 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 99, p. 3352.

⁷⁶ Board of Revenue, 1 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2743-5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 21 January 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 217, p. 587.

⁷⁸ Ibid., February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, p. 1869.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 225, p. 3326.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 225, pp. 3349-52.

⁸¹ Madras Council, 6 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, p. 5114.

⁸² Board of Revenue, 10 October 1801, Report, Vol. 3, p. 92.

combination formed 'the links in the treacherous chain of deceit'.⁸³

Kallarnadu, a rugged region of thorny shrubs, situated between Madurai and Tiruchirapalli, served as the meeting ground of the three parallel rebel organisations of Tirunelveli, Ramnad and Dindigul. The Kallans, the inhabitants of this hilly territory, were not only gallant fighters but the inveterate enemies of the Company for generations. Large sections of them had already lent their support to Marudu and the associates of Kattabomman.⁸⁴ Gopala Nayak more than the other leaders effectively prevailed upon them and gained their alliance. He sent Ellappa Mudali on missions to Kallarnadu. On the 25th of February Kaliani Tevar and Perumal Swami Pillai, the deputies of Kallarnadu, visited Dindigul and gave their consent to join the League.⁸⁵ On meeting them at Virupakshi, Gopala Nayak exclaimed: 'The happy time now is approaching for all chiefs under distress. Go both of you, Kaliani Tevar and Perumal Swami Pillai to Ghazi Khan who came at the head of the Mysore camp now at Pallipatti in their bounds close to the Palni bounds and as both of my deputy Tomachi Modali and Poojari Nayak's deputy Komi Reddi are there I will send people to accompany you to that place'.⁸⁶

The Dindigul League looked upon Tipu as a possible source of support in the contemplated struggle. However it had no intention to play second fiddle to the designs of the Sultan. Collector Hurdis, asserted positively that the leaders of Dindigul decided to use their alliance with Tipu 'as a blind to their attempts' and that they never wanted to be the instruments of the policy, followed by the Sultan.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the League established intimate relations with Mysore. Gopala Nayak deputed Tomachi Mudali and Poojari Nayak sent Komi Reddi as their *vakeels* to the court of Tipu. At their request the Sultan sent a detachment under the

⁸³ B. Hurdis, 27 March 1799, Report to the Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2844-6.

⁸⁴ Madras Council, 6 December 1799, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 99, p. 3321.

Ibid., 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3498-3501.

⁸⁵ Board of Revenue, 1 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2738-42.

⁸⁶ Perumal Swami Pillai, a declaration, Board of Revenue, 16 March 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2748-53.

⁸⁷ Board of Revenue, 28 March 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 225, p. 3346.

command of Ghazi Khan to the southern border of Mysore to act in collaboration with the League. On the 26th of February Komi Reddi returned to Virupakshi and after further deliberations went back to the camp of Mysore. Gopala Nayak gave money for the expenses of Kaliani Tevar and Perumal Swami Nayak and directed them to the camp of Ghazi Khan with proper escort. On reaching Pallipatti Ghazi Khan received the two deputies, took them to his tent, exchanged presents with them and held a long discussion. After it was over, he presented them with a turban and a letter. The deputies returned to Dindigul and handed over the letter to a conference of chiefs, that was by then summoned at Virupakshi. They reported to the meeting of the rebels that Ghazi Khan had instructed them to receive guidance from Gopala Nayak and to make incursions to all places at the time of the insurrection and to capture matchlocks, money and horses from the camps of the enemy. On the 1st of March the deputies returned to Kallarnadu.⁸⁸ When these dismal tidings reached B. Hurdis, he reported to the Board of Revenue on the 18th of March 1799 that the influence of Lakshmi Nayak and Ghazi Khan had effectively prevailed over the chiefs of Dindigul. They were determined to occupy the territories of the Company and threatened the posts of Mombarra, Yerrakottai and other places. The inhabitants of Kallarnadu were ready and the people of Manaparai had gone over to the rebels. Madurai passed under the hostile influence. The designs of the insurgents were deeply laid and the means at the disposal of the Company were too small to cope with this threatening development. In fact, the Dindigul League, as the Collector asserted, wove the web of revolt, aimed at the liberation of territories from the British control.⁸⁹

When the Fourth Mysore War broke out on the 5th of March 1799, the Company called upon the poligars and other chiefs to assist its military operations against Tipu. But the chieftains not only refused their support but proceeded to utilise the opportunity in every possible way to strengthen the rebel cause.⁹⁰ Parties of armed men attacked and plundered the posts of the Company at

⁸⁸ Perumal Swami Pillai, a declaration, Board of Revenue, 16 March 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2748-53.

⁸⁹ Board of Revenue, 1 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 223, pp. 2754-7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 14 November 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 239, p. 9230.

Gooddum, Dharapuram and Columbum. A body of rebels led by Lakshmi Nayak assembled at Palni and raided Yerrakottai.⁹¹ As in Ramnad, the patriots sought to equip themselves with fire arms, plundered from the Company's stores, but the enemy made such a disposition of troops as to frustrate their objective.⁹² A detachment led by Major Lindsay surprised the party of Lakshmi Nayak at Columbum and dispersed it.⁹³ The activities of the rebel groups appeared defiant but were limited so as to provoke no wider conflict.

In a bid to dissuade Gopala Nayak from his hostile activity Hurdis charged him that he listened to the foolish tales of Ghazi Khan, sent his emissaries to Kallarnadu and introduced Kaliani Tevar to receive orders from Mysore.⁹⁴ As the rebel diplomat contemptuously ignored this charge, the Collector in October 1799 summoned him to explain his conduct. The chief, on the other hand, confident of his growing influence, refused compliance. This placed the Board of Revenue in an unanticipated quandary—to follow up the Collector's recommendation of employing force or to compromise with British authority for neither of which it was prepared. Considering the changes effected in Mysore, which left the rebel chiefs without refuge, and the severe examples made in Tirunelveli with the suppression of the Poligar League, the Madras administration decided to review the circumstances and to grant him another chance of submission.⁹⁵ Accordingly, in November 1799 it served a second summons, directing him to attend on the Collector, failing which he was warned that he would be subjected to exemplary punishment and that he had the example of Kattabomman. Yet the defiant chief rejected the order. Thereupon Madras Council decided that until it was at liberty to assemble a force sufficient to subdue the combined power of the allied chiefs, it should not aggravate the situation. The Board of Revenue directed the Collector not to threaten Gopala Nayak with the displeasure of the Company to the extent of committing a pledge of

⁹¹ Madras Council, 6 August 1797, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, p. 5089.

⁹² Board of Revenue, 15 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 225, pp. 3267-8.

⁹³ Madras Council, 6 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, pp. 5060 and 5159.

⁹⁴ Board of Revenue, 12 September 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 234, p. 7626.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 28 October 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 238, p. 8818.

his authority but to restrain himself to the warning of the inevitable consequences that might follow the combined provocation of the resistance of the Company.⁹⁶

Kerala Varma and Malabar-Coimbatore League

Kerala Varma, a prince of the Kottayattu family of Malabar, popularly known as the Rajah of Pazhassi, engaged the Company's forces in a long and bitter conflict at a time when the leaders in other regions of the British-dominated South India had been organising leagues of the insurgents. As the conflict continued, he too realised the wisdom of enlisting the support of the chiefs who were like minded, not only of Malabar but of Coimbatore and Mysore. In consequence the rise of the Malabar-Coimbatore League marked an incidental development of the struggle and not a prelude to it, as it was in other regions. The factors that initiated Kerala Varma's rebellion against the British administration had centred primarily on personal grievances. However he gained the support of the inhabitants and won allies because of the common interests that they entertained against the foreign rule. The object of the insurrection was to liquidate British power and to establish an independent power in Malabar.⁹⁷ Though the goal was limited during the early period, as the conflict dragged on, the rebels identified their interests with those of other regional leagues.

Between 1787 and 1788 the *thampurans* or rajahs of Malabar, threatened by the forces of Tipu, fled to Travancore. Among them were the princes of Kottayattu or Pazhassi, an ancient royal house. The Senior Rajah before his flight summoned Kerala Varma, the youngest prince, and instructed him to protect the country. Accordingly, the latter assembled the inhabitants, retired to the jungles and assisted them in the development of a new homeland.⁹⁸ Frequently, in defiance to the authority of the Sultan, he with a band of determined followers issued forth from the woods and levied contributions. During the Third Mysore War (1790-1792) carried away by promises and offers, he assisted the British forces against Tipu. On the cession of Malabar to the Company

⁹⁶ Ibid., December 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 241, p. 10373.

⁹⁷ Madras Council, 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 217-8.

⁹⁸ Report of the Malabar Committee on the Cottiote Rebellion, pp. 121-122.

by Mysore the second and third members of the royal house of Kottayattu returned, while the Senior Rajah, anxious to avoid any disturbance to his life during the evening of his career, decided to remain in Travancore. The two rajahs requested the Company to restore the management of the territory that formerly belonged to their house. In compliance with the request it put them in possession of their lands, but reserved the right to receive one-fifth of the revenues of the *nadas* or districts of Tamarasseri and Kurumbara. Rightly, Kerala Varma considered it as an offence, for he who stood gallantly with the inhabitants was left in the wilderness, while the senior rajahs who cowardly fled regained possession of the territory. Bold and ambitious he turned an inveterate enemy of the Company: he bitterly resented the introduction of its administration and decided to maintain his jurisdiction in defiance to its authority.⁹⁹

Kerala Varma consolidated his strength. He commanded the firm attachment of the inhabitants and held possession of a hilly country covered with close and extensive jungles. Independent, turbulent and refractory in disposition, he thwarted the sustained efforts made by the Company to establish its hold on Malabar. The English considered him as the most unreasonable and intractable of the rajahs of north Malabar and declared that his conduct was distinguished by a contempt for all authority and a total disregard to allegiance to any power.¹⁰⁰

In 1794 the English in pursuit of their policy of divide and rule negotiated a settlement with the Rajah of Kurumbranad, a member of the Kottayattu house for the collection of revenue from Kottayattu and Wynaad. The Company stationed a body of troops in his territory in support of this settlement. Yet Kerala Varma in entire annihilation of the influence of his brother established his direct control over the districts, exercised his jurisdiction and threatened to cut down all the pepper vines if the English persisted in counting on them.¹⁰¹ As no alternative presented itself, the Supreme Government of Bengal directed the Bombay Council, which administered Malabar, to seize the rebel prince and bring

⁹⁹ H. F. Buchanan, *Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. 2, pp. 145-6.

¹⁰⁰ J. A. Wilson, 15 October 1801, Report on Malabar, pp. 1-3.

¹⁰¹ James Hodgson, Narrative of Circumstances leading to the Cotiate Rebellion, pp. 3-54.

him to trial. Accordingly, in April 1796 a detachment led by Lieutenant James Gordan raided Pazhassi, the headquarters of the prince, and seized his property including treasure worth 17,000 rupees. Kerala Varma, who had scent of the hostile approach, escaped to the jungles of Manathana. Because of incessant rains the chief suffered untold misery in the forests. In June 1796 he wrote a penitential letter to Colonel Dow, the Commanding Officer, alluding to his 'evil fate which had compelled him to remove from his ancient abode to this strange habitation' and proposing to return, if permission were given and property restored. The Bombay Council was in the meantime concerned at the possibility of Kerala Varma establishing an alliance with Tipu. Colonel Dow therefore permitted him to return to Pazhassi and restored all his properties except the treasure. The prince returned to his headquarters but appeared unreconciled at the denial of the possession of his treasure and territory. Joined by a body of rebels under Ambu, Kerala Varma went back to his mountain recess.¹⁰² The penitential letter of Kerala Varma appeared similar to the letters of professed loyalty, addressed by the rebel chiefs to the Company. It is open to doubt whether it was a tactical step aimed at recovering his treasure and enlisting the service of more of the inhabitants. Now the Malabar Commission warned him that he would be taken to task as an irreclaimable delinquent and punished and that if he escaped to the jungles he would be hunted from jungle to jungle and condemned to lead the life of a vagabond.¹⁰³ Eager to play one local force against the other, the Company now called upon the inhabitants to return to their allegiance to the Rajah of Kurumbranad. To the chagrin of the Bombay Council, however, it found even the followers of this Rajah going over to the rebels. Threatened with death penalty and confiscation of their properties, the insurgents retired to the most impenetrable of the jungles. They assembled parties above and below the mountains, erected barriers, set up posts at Peruvey, Coonjirot, Carrote and Iodikattala, felled trees, refused payment of taxes either to the Company or to its allied rajahs and cut off British communications.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² William Logan (ed.), *Malabar*, Vol. 1 (1951), pp. 510-515.

¹⁰³ Report of the Malabar Committee on the Cotiote Rebellion, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Rickards, 19 January 1798, Narrative of Occurrences leading to the late Cotiote Rebellion, pp. 93-187.

From the caverns of the mountains the rebels organised a powerful league. They gained the support of the peasants and the alliance of numerous chieftains. Kerala Varma circulated palm leaf letters attributing the maladies that afflicted them to the British rule and inciting them to join the standard of rebellion. The appeals made and missions sent by the prince had the desired effect. The inhabitants of Wynaad, Kottayattu and Kurumbranad and the Nambiars of Iruvinad abandoned their villages and went over to the insurgents.¹⁰⁵ The rebel influence spread openly as well as clandestinely and prevailed over most of Malabar and the nearby regions.¹⁰⁶ The ranks of the insurgents gained more strength when the Rajahs of Kurumbranad and Parappanad, whom the Company considered as loyal, entered into collusion with Kerala Varma in the organisation of resistance. The eastern branch of the Zamorin's house, resentful of British control, fled to the hills and allied itself with the insurgents. The Moplas had remained restive for long not only because of the sympathy they had for Tipu but also because of the oppression they suffered under the Company's administration. Led by the powerful chiefs, Atun Gurukkal, Chempan Pokker and Unnimoota, they moved to the hills, where they entered into an understanding with the other rebel leaders.

The proximity of Malabar with Tamilnadu and the identity of interests enabled the rebel League to extend its activity to the east. Oppressive taxation and restrictions seriously injured the economic interests of the Gounders of Coimbatore, who had close commercial relations with the West Coast. Annoyed at the British attitude, they allied themselves with the rebels of Malabar. As a result of this development Coimbatore became a centre of insurgent activity from both Malabar and Dindigul.¹⁰⁷

The leaders of Malabar and Coimbatore, as the Dindigul League did, turned to Tipu Sultan for aid. Wynaad being a disputed territory, neither Mysore nor the Company exercised any definite authority. Left free, Kerala Varma consolidated his influence in this mountainous terrain and opened correspondence with Tipu. He held a conference with the Sultan's Killedar at

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁰⁶ J. A. Wilson, 15 February 1801, Report on Malabar, pp. 1-5.

¹⁰⁷ Report of the Malabar Committee on the Cotiote Rebellion, pp. 130-135.

Kankanikottai. On the 14th of December 1796 the Rajah of Coorg, a traitor to the patriotic cause, addressed a letter to the Commissioners of Malabar intimating them of the rebel intrigues in Mysore. In December 1796, when Tipu reached Egadi Devakottai, Kerala Varma, accompanied by other leaders, visited him. The Rajah of Coorg, who gained information about this meeting, reported in January 1797 to the enemy that a Malabar rajah held a conference with the Sultan on the frontier of Mysore and after discussion went away. This meeting led to an understanding. Kerala Varma and the Rajahs of Parappanad and Karamakotta paid their allegiance to the Sultan in disregard to the Company's hegemony. Mysore supplied 2,000 horse and numerous tents to assist the rebellion. Tipu and the rajahs decided to construct a fort at Koonyallah, as a rebel stronghold, and to drive the Europeans from below the Ghats.¹⁰⁸ In 1798 the Company relinquished its claims on Wynaad in favour of Mysore, yet the Sultan not only left the rebels in undisturbed possession of the district but tacitly allowed them to exercise their complete control.¹⁰⁹

The jurisdiction over the province being threatened, the administration of revenue impeded and the collection of cardamom and pepper jeopardised, the Company in 1796 sent forces by the mountain passes for re-establishing communications. This marked the beginning of hostilities. In January a British detachment, led by Captain Lawrence, reached Kottangary to reinforce a body of troops employed in assisting collection, but was attacked and compelled to retreat. Captain Bowman, leading the second expedition, reached Manantody. In a series of encounters with the insurgents he lost sixty-six of his troops killed; after which he retreated. Emboldened by these victories, the guerillas attacked a detachment stationed at Wynaad, but were repulsed. In January 1797 a fresh wave of conflict broke out. The Moplas of Ernad and Malapuram rose in rebellion and interrupted collections. On the 7th of January the rebels led by Kaiteri Ambu ambushed and cut into pieces a party of Captain Bowman. The succeeding day the armed groups wiped out the battalions of the Company, that were stationed at

¹⁰⁸ Robert Rickards, 19 January 1798, Narrative of Occurrences leading to the Cotiote Rebellion, pp. 174-243.

¹⁰⁹ Madras Council, 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 230-241.

Pazhassi. A solitary person escaped this disaster to tell this tragic story. In subsequent battles, fought at Peria and Manantody, the rebels gained more victories and expelled the enemy from Wynaad. Greatly perturbed at these reverses, the Bombay Council rushed reinforcements and appointed General Bowles to command the operations. Directed by this experienced commander, Major Anderson defeated Ambu near Kottangary while Colonel Dow advanced to Wynaad.¹¹⁰ The Company's forces captured Tadi-kulam, a rebel stronghold, in February 1797. Undeterred by these reverses, the insurgents continued their resistance. In the bitterly contested battles of Devote Angadi and Kanjot Angadi, fought between the 9th and the 12th of March, they routed the British detachment of Colonel Dow and reasserted their influence in Wynaad. On the 18th of March at Peria they administered another severe blow to a column of 1,100 troops and killed its commander, Major Cameron.

The Company now appeared unprepared for a prolonged guerilla war and entertained an anxiety to settle terms. Tipu extended active assistance to the rebels. Possibility of a war with France loomed large. At the request of the Bombay administration the Rajahs of Chirakkal and Parappanad opened a negotiation with Kerala Varma, leading to the conclusion of peace on the 23rd of July 1797. The rebel prince consented to respect a settlement, to be made by the Company with the Senior Rajah of the Kottayattu family, hitherto a resident in Travancore, for the revenue administration of this district. The Company, on its part, restored to Kerala Varma the treasure that was plundered at Pazhassi, pardoned all that he did and sanctioned an annual allowance of 8,000 rupees. The Senior Rajah assumed control of the district but before long he fell in arrears of his payment. He was, therefore, pensioned off and allowed to retire to Travancore. The Company now took over the administration of Kottayattu together with Palakkad. Despite this forward policy, the English experienced no challenge to their authority.¹¹¹ In 1798 Tipu sent a message to Kerala Varma directing him to send his trusted lieutenant, Emen Nair to Srirangapatnam so that he could send a force to assist the rebels of Malabar. Emen Nair refused

¹¹⁰ Report of the Malabar Committee on the Cotiote Rebellion, pp. 130-160.

¹¹¹ William Logan (ed.), *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 499-520.

to go and Malabar presented no problem to the Company even during the Fourth Mysore War.¹¹²

The rise of the regional Leagues of Ramnad, Tirunelveli, Dindigul and Malabar marked a simultaneous and spontaneous development. This was because the alien sway was resented everywhere and the inhabitants appeared determined to fight out the issue. The emergence of the rebel alignments, a remarkable phenomenon as it was, poised a hope in the minds of the enslaved and the oppressed. The influence of the leagues extended to the nearby regions—of the League of Tirunelveli to Madurai, that of Ramnad to Madurai and Tiruchirapalli, that of Dindigul to Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Salem and Coimbatore and that of Malabar to Coimbatore. Marudu Pandyan served as a link between the Tirunelveli and Dindigul Leagues and Tipu Sultan between Dindigul and Malabar Leagues. If the Kallans of Kallarnadu served as the link in the alliance systems of Tamilnadu, the Gounders of Coimbatore performed a parallel function as between the rebel groups of Dindigul and Malabar. The two northern leagues entered into a limited collaboration with Mysore, while the southern leagues did not. The different alliances operated in an extensive region of South India and cherished common ideals. It was possible, therefore, that the leagues would have perhaps had some kind of understanding. However it cannot be denied that if it had existed it would have been oblique and nebulous, for otherwise they would have assisted each other and co-ordinated their resistance when the British forces engaged the southernmost and the northernmost leagues.

In March 1799 when the Company withdrew its troops from several of its garrisons in the South and declared war on Mysore, it appeared that the situation presented an opportunity for the commencement of hostilities. Yet the insurgents risked no conflict. This was perhaps because of an awareness of their comparative weakness or a calculated restraint, imposed by the unfavourable turn of events in Mysore. Nevertheless the leaders except those of Malabar did not allow the situation drift unexploited. They raided the British posts, plundered their stores and equipped themselves with captured fire arms. Yet the year 1799 proved

¹¹² Emen Nair, 1 November 1800, letter to Major Walker, *Political Consultations*, Vol. 4, pp. 731-6.

CENTRES OF REBEL ACTIVITY, 1795-1799



MAP I

very critical. The Tirunelveli League was suppressed and Kattabomman executed. The Malabar League was reconciled and Kerala Varma pensioned off. Mysore was vanquished and Tipu Sultan killed. The confidence of the inhabitants in their ability to carry on the struggle appeared to have been shaken. In this hour of peril when the alliance system trembled in the balance, the unruffled Marudu Pandyan rose to the occasion with redoubled vigour. With calculated audacity he extended shelter to the defeated insurgents of Tirunelveli and sent them to safety for service with the Dindigul League.¹¹³ To the sphere of influence that was Kattabomman's in Tirunelveli he extended his activity, instilled a fresh confidence in the broken ranks and gained the alliance of the *Jatitalavan* of Tutukudi, the headman of the Parava community. He promptly sent Melappan and Muthu Karuppa Tevar to Ramnad to reassert the rebel influence that had been disrupted due to British military operations and brought the Kallar tribes into closer association. The sagacity of Marudu contributed to the preservation of the alliance system.¹¹⁴ The Leagues of Ramnad and Dindigul survived; upon them there devolved the mantle of patriotic struggle.

¹¹³ Madras Council, 3 March 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 267, p. 1750.

¹¹⁴ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, 1 March 1801, pp. 71 and 77.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS PENINSULAR CONFEDERACY

THE YEAR 1799 marked a turning point in South India's march to the arena of conflict. The triumph of the enemy over Mysore and the Tirunelveli League administered a serious but not a fatal blow to the patriotic struggle. The rebels not only retained their alliance system but strengthened it. Added to this, the stories of the gallant resistance offered by Tipu in the north and Kattabomman in the south to alien domination and the ideals for which they faced death gave rise to a fresh wave of nationalistic fervour across the Peninsula. The heroic struggle of the French peasants against inequality and autocracy and the hostile powers brought in a fresh inspiration to the movement. More and more of the inhabitants swung toward the standard of rebellion. The two rebel leagues of Tamilnadu, that escaped destruction in the wake of the fall of Mysore, extended their activity across new frontiers. An interplay of these powerful trends led to the formation of the Peninsular Confederacy against the British sway.

Rumblings of Deepening Crisis

For fear of detection and execution, many of the insurgents of the far South who had been engaged in the organisation of the rebel league fled to the jungles of Kalayarkoil in Sivaganga. Upon the British conquest of Mysore the rebels of the western region too found asylum in these secure woods. From eleven to twelve miles across in every direction with no villages or cultivation to break the continuity of it, this thick jungle extended to the suburbs of Manamadurai, Shawkottai and Singampunari. The trees which grew in it were of the hardiest kind and even if several trees had been cut asunder, they still remained in an upright position, being supported by the creepers. Inaccessible to the strangers and guarded by the rebels of Marudu Pandyan, this region, after the fall of Mysore and the Tirunelveli League, assumed a new importance as a centre of intrigues. The leaders of Tamilnadu and Kannadanadu met in the heart of this wood and held frequent discussions.¹

¹ Board of Revenue, 28 December 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 305, pp. 15362 and 15365.

The villages, on the other hand, opened a secret correspondence from one to the other through confidential messengers who were paid from voluntary contributions. This system, that resembled the committees of correspondence of the American Colonies in their struggle against Britain worked effectively in Kanara.² In Malabar the inhabitants, who refused to compromise with the settlement of Kerala Varma with the Company, circulated palm leaf-letters, urging resistance.³ The people of Madurai and Dindigul gathered together in outdoor assemblies, referred to in the English records as *kootums*, to hear the leaders of the struggle and discuss the issues. These assemblies frequently met even during the later period.⁴ The records refer to 4,000 inhabitants attending a meeting of insurgents held at Delli in February 1801.⁵ It was in these gatherings that the rebels devised the practice of circulating the *killa*, a betel leaf pierced with the nail of the finger. When it was sent, it was reckoned as a serious summons, an urgent order, to the inhabitants to rush to the field of battle in support of their compatriots. This became a common practice with the outbreak of the rebellion.⁶

When the people of the southern provinces were holding deliberations and the rebels were meeting in the caverns of the mountains, yet hesitant to rise in open rebellion, an amazing turn of events struck a fresh note of optimism. In the north though Tipu had been defeated, the freedom-loving inhabitants of Mysore did not surrender timidly. They reorganised resistance in the northern and western regions of Kannadanadu. In Europe the French Revolution broke out in 1789 and the French, endowed with a revolutionary zeal, engaged the British and their allies in a deadly contest. Before long the tidings of this war reached South India.

Hopeful Events in Kannadanadu

In consequence of the British victory over Tipu, many of the patriots fled to remote regions. They reorganised resistance to

² Ibid., 28 August 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 261, pp. 1430-31.

³ W. Logan (ed.), *Malabar* (1889), Vol. 1, p. 267.

⁴ Board of Revenue, 28 December 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 305, pp. 15350-51.

⁵ Ibid., 5 March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 275, p. 2549.

⁶ Madras Council, 22 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 290, p. 8178.

the alien administration in co-operation with the inhabitants or furnished their services to the rebel ranks. Among them the most formidable were Krishnappa Nayak and Dhoondaji Waug.

Krishnappa Nayak, Rajah of the district situated on eastern side of Kanara, referred to in the records as Bel country or Bellum or Biliam, held possession of an extensive territory in former times. Neither Hyder Ali nor Tipu Sultan did ever succeed in dispossessing him from his strongholds of Arisikarai and Rakanara.⁷ Upon the British annexation of Kanara and establishment of its influence over Mysore, he decided to fight the alien aggression. Meanwhile Vittel Hegeda, Subba Rao and Mahtab Khan rose into prominence as the leaders of popular resistance against the Company's rule in Kanara. They were soon joined by the Moplas of Malabar. The rebel chiefs sent their emissaries in the name of Futteh Hyder, son of Tipu and prisoner at Vellore, and to the villages; and enlisted the services of the disbanded troops of Mysore and the deserters from the forces of the Company. Krishnappa Nayak met Subba Rao and through him entered into an alliance with Mahtab Khan and Vittel Hegeda. An experienced soldier in the service of Tipu Sultan, Subba Rao assumed the command of the rebel parties. Thus there came into shape a rebel league in the western region of Kannadanadu.⁸

Early in 1800 these leaders raised disturbances. In January Hegeda, at the command of a body of insurgents, advanced from Vittel to Kanara, where the disaffected inhabitants joined the rebel camp, seized the revenue of the Company and plundered Manjeswar. Thomas Munro, the Collector of Kanara, wanted to take prompt action against the rebels but for want of troops in adequate strength and for fear that the example of Hegeda would be followed by a great number of leaders, who only waited for an opportunity to rise in open defiance, observed a self-imposed restraint.⁹ Mahtab Khan challenged British authority in the southern part of Kanara. A native of Coorg, he was taken a captive by the troops of Hyder Ali and subsequently employed in the treasury at Srirangapatnam. After effecting his escape during

⁷ Edward Clive, 13 August 1799, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 5, p. 338.

⁸ Board of Revenue, 3 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, pp. 5917-18.

⁹ Ibid., 30 January 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 243, p. 809.

the confusion, created by the British assault of this fort, he fled to the west where he was joined by the disaffected. Reinforced by the rebels of Subba Rao, he invaded the Company's posts in Kanara. However, defeated by the enemy, the rebels fled to the mountains. Here they were joined by more of the inhabitants. Greatly strengthened, the insurgents made frequent depredations into the territories of the Company in the West Coast.¹⁰ The rebel league gained an important victory when it dislodged the British forces stationed at the strategic pass of Subramania Ghat, also known as Bissulu Ghat and cut off British communications between Mysore and Kanara.¹¹ The armed ryots, who went over to the rebels, took up positions in the woods for the defence of the barriers.¹²

Dhoondaji Waug, a man of masterful will and dominating influence, raised the banner of revolt in Kannada-Maratha land. Native of Chennagiri in Shimoga, he entered the service of Hyder Ali as a horseman in 1780. Deserting the service of Mysore subsequently, he lived the life of a rebel at Dharwar for a short period but reconciled by Tipu he re-joined the army. With the fall of Srirangapatnam to the British forces in 1799, he escaped to the Maratha land. From here he opened a correspondence with the *sardars*, formerly in the service of Tipu and gathered a body of armed men and 5,000 horse from the remnant of the army of Mysore and from among the inhabitants of desperate fortune. Almost all the Muslims of Mysore associated themselves with the rebels.¹³ Dhoondaji Waug occupied Shimoga and proclaimed himself 'King of the Two Worlds'.¹⁴

After establishing his headquarters at Shimoga, Dhoondaji Waug engineered designs for the overthrow of British power in Mysore. He committed depredations in the north-west, captured war equipment from the British stores and created his own artillery corps. This was followed by the occupation of Nagar and Bednore from the Company. A body of rebels moved to the east and occupied Gooty in the Nizam's territory.¹⁵ He formulated plans

¹⁰ Madras Council, 24 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 274-7.

¹¹ Ibid., 12 April 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 267, pp. 2125-35.

¹² Ibid., 3 June 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, p. 3259.

¹³ Ibid., 14 November 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 2, p. 694.

¹⁴ *Marquess Wellesley's Despatches*, Vol. 2, p. 53.

¹⁵ Ibid., 20 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257, pp. 5494-5.

to kidnap Colonel Wellesly, Commander of British forces in Mysore, when he went out for hunting, and to murder Purnea, who had abandoned the cause of the fallen Sultan to become minister of the British-made ruler of Mysore. However, these designs could not be carried through as Wellesly received timely intelligence and took precautions.¹⁶

The rebel activity threatened the British influence in Mysore. Annoyed at the daring plots made by Dhoondaji Waug and concerned at the extensive depredations made by his armed men, Arthur Wellesly commenced military operations in July 1799. He not only assembled the troops of Mysore but brought reinforcements from Bengal. One of the detachments led by Colonel Pater advanced to the Fort of Hassan and checked the rebel incursions from Nagar. A more powerful expedition under the command of Colonel Dalrymple moved to Chitaldroog. Reinforced by fresh troops sent from Bangalore and Calcutta, it intercepted supplies to the rebel posts and seized a large quantity of grain.¹⁷ The hill fort of Chitaldroog fell to the invaders, but the insurgents occupied Goondair. Nevertheless the British troops expelled the rebel columns from Goondair and followed up this victory with the capture of the fortified hill of Chingherry. The insurgents suffered heavy losses in these battles.¹⁸ Many were killed in action, forty died in a clash at Nagar and forty prisoners were hanged to death at Goondair.¹⁹ In the meantime a detachment led by Colonel Stevenson advanced from Chitaldroog in the direction of Bednore. On the 31st of July 1799 it crossed River Tunga-Bhadra and carried Shimoga by assault. On the 8th of August Dalrymple stormed the fort of Hoornelli, situated on the western bank of the river. Most of the rebels escaped, but others including the *Killedar* of the fort were caught and executed.²⁰ A detachment of the Nizam, assisted by a body of British troops under Colonel Brown, recovered possession of Gooty.²¹ Having driven the insurgents to

¹⁶ C. Hayavadana Rao (ed.), *Mysore Gazetteer*, Part 4, pp. 2720-22.

¹⁷ Madras Council, 7 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257, p. 5271.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 256, pp. 4551-5.

¹⁹ C. Hayavadana Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, Part 4, p. 2724.

²⁰ Madras Council, 20 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257, pp. 5527-34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257, p. 5537.

dire straits, Dalrymple and Stevenson decided on measures to launch a joint assault on the camp of Dhoondaji Waug, which occupied a strong position between the fort and the town of Shikarpur. On the 17th of August the forces charged the rebel cavalry and stormed the fort in a simultaneous offensive. Dhoondaji Waug fought with determination, but his gallant struggle proved futile. Most of the rebels were killed, though Dhoondaji Waug with some of his followers escaped to the frontier of the Maratha Empire.²² Here another disaster, quite unexpected, overtook the fugitives. A detachment of the Peshwa, led by Ghokla Punt, attacked their camp and carried away all their elephants, horses, camels, bullocks, guns and ammunition. Deprived of their strongholds and equipment, the insurgents found themselves caught in a strange dilemma of inaction.²³ Smarting from humiliation, the rebels were reduced to the compelling necessity of seeking allies elsewhere.

Message of the French Revolution

The French brought in the message of the Revolution and their great struggle with Great Britain to the patriots of South India in a crucial period. As part of their global strategy to promote resistance to the English, the leaders of Revolutionary France entertained an ambition to extend their activity to the East. Determined to send an expedition to India, Napoleon Bonaparte considered Egypt as a vital link to be occupied and accordingly in 1798-1799 he undertook his brilliant campaign. Talleyrand indicated its objective, when he declared: 'Our war with England offers the most favourable opportunity for the invasion of Egypt. Threatened by an imminent landing on her shores she will not desert her coasts to prevent our enterprise in Egypt. This also offers us a chance of driving the English out of India by sending thither 15,000 troops from Cairo via Suez.' After landing in Egypt Napoleon decided to concert with Tipu an expedition to India. He despatched a message to the Sultan from Cairo: 'You have already been informed of my arrival on the Red Sea, with

²² Madras Council, 27 August 1799, Military Consultations, Vol. 257 p. 5698.

²³ *Marquess Wellesley's Despatches*, Vol. 2, pp. 114-116.

an innumerable and invincible army, full of the desire of delivering you from the iron yoke of England'. Yet, when the Company's forces invaded Mysore in 1799 the French found it impossible to rush any substantial aid. Subsequently, Napoleon planned an expedition through Central Asia with Russian co-operation, but because of the assassination of Tsar Paul this too did not materialise.²⁴

However the emissaries of Revolutionary France from their base of activity in the Isle of France reached South India.²⁵ They came in batches to the Mysore Coast, moved to the interior, visited the villages and established contacts with the disaffected chiefs. The details of their activities are shrouded in mystery but the intelligence that the Company obtained in August 1798 indicated that the Frenchmen visited Karur, Aruvakurichi and Ramagiri in Tamilnadu.²⁶ Alarmed at this development, the Madras administration instructed the loyal poligars to seize all Europeans moving in a suspicious manner and offered rewards for apprehending them.²⁷ Now the French moved to the north and established their influence in the camp of Dhoondaji Waug. In 1799 a messenger arrived from Mahe and handed over to Dhoondaji Waug a large packet, sent by the French Government and a note in French, signed by one Dubec Chapuy. The *hircarrah*, who witnessed this, reported that he knew nothing of the contents of the large packet but the note was intended to encourage the rebels to continue their war with the English, promising all assistance. The spy saw a third letter, with three seals affixed to it, in the hand of Dhoondaji Waug but he knew not from whom it came nor to whom it was addressed. About the same time a Parsi reached the camp and told Dhoondaji Waug that a French force was on its way to Bengal. The rebel chief immediately ordered him to return to Bengal and to transmit further intelligence. Among the Europeans whom the *hircarrah* saw in the camp of the insurgents there were a few deserters from the service of the Company, in-

²⁴ J. Marriot, *The English in India*, pp. 107-9.

²⁵ Edward Clive, 13 August 1799, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 5, p. 338.

²⁶ A letter from Manāparai, 17 August 1798, Military Consultations, Vol. 241, p. 5088.

²⁷ Madras Council, July 1798, Military Consultations, Vol. 241, p. 5089.

cluding Charles Gordon,²⁸ described as a tall, stout, handsome, young man.²⁹

The machinations of the patriots with the revolutionaries of France are entangled in obscurity. The extent of the impact of the French Revolution on the movement in South India too cannot be ascertained. However, the administration of the Company had asserted that the French promoted dissemination of revolutionary ideals and sought to kindle nationalist uprisings against the British.³⁰ This was of particular significance in the context of the formative stage of the anti-British alliance system.

First Tamil Mission to Kannada Rebels

The different organisations of the rebels kept themselves acquainted with the political developments of the time. Two factors in particular contributed to this trend. The emissaries of France moved from village to village and furnished information about the conflicts with the English. As it was a practice with the belligerent powers, the rebel chiefs employed *hircarrahs* to transmit intelligence about the movement of the hostile forces and the struggles of the insurgent powers. Through these means the exploits of the leaders of Kannadanadu and Maratha land particularly of Krishnappa Nayak and Dhoondaji Waug came to be known in the southern provinces and were discussed in the villages.³¹ The discovery of this identity of interests led the patriots of Tamilnadu in undertaking hazardous missions to the northern region of the Peninsula for seeking the support of the Kannada rebels. In these exploits the peasants of Coimbatore and Salem played the most conspicuous role. It is not clear whether all of them were undertaken at the instance of the rebel leagues of the far South. However it was certain that the inspiration came

²⁸ It does not seem that Dhoondaji Waug placed any confidence in this European adventurer. No reference about his role could be traced in the subsequent history of the rebellious movement. In Chinese history it is indicated that one Charles Gordon fought on the side of the Manchus for the suppression of the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion. This was in 1863.

²⁹ I. Uthoff, 14 September 1800, letter to Wellesley, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 534-6.

³⁰ Edward Clive, 13 August 1799, Political Despatches to England, Vol. 5, p. 338.

³¹ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, p. 5594.

from the southern region, for Coimbatore and Salem had been frequently visited by the rebel emissaries of Marudu Pandyan and Gopala Nayak. The inhabitants of these districts had espoused the cause of the rebel alliances and maintained intimate relations with the leaders. Added to these what these missions wanted to attain was to establish a union of interests between the insurgents of the south and of the north.

Anxious to gain the support of Dhoondaji Waug, Chinnan Gour, the headman of the village of Perinthurai near Erode, decided to lead a mission of the rebels to the leaders of the north. The difficulties presented by want of communication, distance and vigilance of the enemy seemed formidable, but they did not deter him from taking this risk. Three other patriots Futteh Mohammad, Muhammad Hasham and Ramanulla Khan volunteered to accompany him. This daring venture was made at an exceptionally propitious moment. The regional leagues had been organised in Tamilnadu and leaders of Mysore had risen in open defiance. What was needed was a bold initiative to bring the insurgents into a common alliance, though the odds against the co-ordination of the war-effort against the deadly foe appeared many. The British occupation of Srirangapatnam and Panjalamkurichi, the citadels of freedom, added an urgency to the need.

The exact date of the mission is not known. The four patriots led by Chinnan Gour visited Dhoondaji Waug at Soonda. This indicates that it reached the rebel camp by the middle of the year 1799, the interval between the occupation of Soonda by the rebels after the fall of Tipu and the recovery of this place by the English. Chinnan Gour explained that the inhabitants of the south were ready to rise in rebellion and that he would furnish his services for promoting co-ordination of rebel effort. He requested the chief to send a party to Coimbatore. However, Dhoondaji Waug appeared disinclined and replied that he had not yet consolidated the rebel control over the liberated territories and that it would not be possible for him to send a party to so remote a region. In fact Dhoondaji Waug experienced difficulties in maintaining his hold against the combined forces of the Company and Mysore. He was slow in understanding the vista of great possibilities offered by the mission from Erode. Yet with a lingering hope the mission stayed on and moved with the camp of Dhoondaji Waug, hunted

from place to place by the British troops. It was not until the rebels were beaten by the enemy and driven into the Maratha Empire that the king of the two worlds could be persuaded to see the logic of events. In April 1800 he sent three of his confidential agents with Chinnan Gour to the south. He directed his agents and the three members of the mission to take guidance from Chinnan Gour in the organisation of revolt in Coimbatore and Madurai.

To excite no suspicion with the enemy, the parties returned to Coimbatore by different routes. Chinnan Gour and the three agents of Dhoondaji Waug, riding on horse-back, reached Krishnagiri, proceeded to Tiruppur and from there to the bank of the Kaveri. Here the members of the party separated from each other in a bid to prevent detection and taking different routes reached Virupakshi, the headquarters of the League of Dindigul.³² Upon their arrival at Periakottai near Virupakshi, Gopala Nayak sent a message enquiring whether they brought any letter from Dhoondaji Waug. Chinnan Gour replied that they were given a letter for Gopala Nayak together with several others for the headmen of the villages but on hearing that the British troops and their agents had been hunting for suspects, they had destroyed them. He narrated what transpired in his meeting with Dhoondaji, but the details are lost in obscurity. However, the three emissaries of Dhoondaji Waug, who accompanied Chinnan Gour, stayed at Dindigul to concert means for formulating a co-ordinated strategy for the northern and southern leagues.³³

Second Tamil Mission to Kannada Rebels

The peasants of Coimbatore, having decided to launch an armed struggle for the redressal of their grievances, organised and sent a second mission to the north. It does not appear that it was undertaken in the context of the first Tamil mission. As discontent spread in the land and people became restive, three influential leaders, Appaji Gour, Venkataramaniah and Kasturi Ranga consulted with each other and agreed upon establishing a union with the rebel leagues of other regions. As Dhoondaji Waug

³² Board of Revenue, 1 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 253, pp. 4754-6.

³³ Ibid., 10 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5576-83.

rose in open rebellion against the Company's authority and as the identity of interests offered the possibility of co-operation, they resolved to send a mission to his camp. The leaders decided to depute Venkataramaniah and his brother Narahari with a message for a joint venture against the common enemy.

After a long and tedious journey the two brothers reached Shikarpur and held an interview with Dhoondaji Waug. The records do not furnish the details of their discussion, obviously because it was held in secret. It was possible that they sought his aid in organising the rebellion in Coimbatore. Dhoondaji Waug wrote six letters and handed them over to Venkataramaniah. Addressed to the leaders of Coimbatore and Salem, Ella Nayak and Swami Nayak of Ramagiri, Vella Gour and Varnawarshi Gour of Erode, Peria Tambi of Aruvakurichi and Kumara Vellee of Perinthurai, these letters appealed to them to join the rebel standard. The letter addressed to Peria Tambi together with a few others was intercepted subsequently by the English at Talamalla. It was of importance as it held out a hope of assistance, for Dhoondaji Waug promised Peria Tambi that he would march to the south in support of the oppressed inhabitants. It proceeds: 'Be it known to you—that Venket Rowniah (Venkataramaniah) having delivered to me your address explained to me verbally (certain circumstances) which I understand. Tending that in the Territories of the Kaffirs³⁴ their oppression has obliged all the Gours (headmen) to fly to the mountains for protection it is my pleasure to signify to you that as soon as the River³⁵ falls I shall move with my *sawarie*³⁶ towards you for which reason you may be confident that you can have nothing to apprehend'.³⁷

Narahari stayed in the camp of Dhoondaji Waug, but Venkataramaniah returned to Coimbatore, visited the village and distributed the letters to the headmen. In the course of his travels through the districts of Coimbatore and Salem for the organisation of the

³⁴ This was the appellation, used by Tipu to mean the English in extreme contempt.

³⁵ The river mentioned in this letter was probably Tunga Bhadra.

³⁶ Sawaree meant journey or march.

³⁷ Nawab Mulki Jehan Bauder Munsheer, (this was the official name assumed by Dhoondaji Waug), 7 October 1799, letter to Peria Tombi, trans., Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 255, p. 5228.

rebellion, Venkataramaniah met Appaji Gour, a powerful leader implicated in conspiracy with Gopala Nayak, and disclosed the details of his daring mission to the camp of Dhoondaji Waug.³⁸

Third Tamil Mission to Kannada Rebels

Now Appaji Gour took the initiative in organising the third mission to the north. He took Venkataramaniah to the villages known to him and discussed with the headmen the implications of forming a union in the light of the discussions that the second mission had with Dhoondaji Waug. After ascertaining the views of the influential people, both of them proceeded to Virupakshi and held a prolonged conference with Gopala Nayak. They obtained the blessing of this rebel diplomat and the latter deputed Tomachi Mudali as his representative in the mission. Khan-i-Jah Khan, a resident at Muddoor and formerly in the cavalry of Tipu, had maintained close contact with the rebels both of the south and of the north. On hearing from Gopala Nayak that the leaders had decided to send a mission to Kannadanadu, Khan-i-Jah Khan, offered his support and deputed his nephew Riza Sahib as his representative.

The four members of the rebel mission, Appaji Gour, Venkataramaniah, Tomachi Mudali and Riza Sahib started from Dindigul. They took different routes as it was customary with the conspirators but agreed to meet at Muddoor. On the way Appaji Gour called on Konindra Velli, a determined rebel, and instructed him to take care of the organisation of the rebellion in the villages of Andoor, Perunthurai and Dotagavaly. Kanindra Velli sent Rengiah as his representative to go along with the mission. All the members of the mission met at Nugeehutty near Muddoor, as was already agreed upon, and held further consultations with Khan-i-Jah Khan. This was not only the largest of all the missions but the most representative and the best informed.

The party left Muddoor on its difficult journey to the north. Avoiding the enemy and the traitors, the patriots reached Girkottai, where Dhoondaji Waug had pitched his tent. The mission initiated a discussion, but the chief disclosed that Chinnan Gour had already visited him and taken over the command of the rebel

³⁸ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5594-5.

parties of Coimbatore. The deputation now conveyed its concern that a less influential person had been entrusted with the task and observed that many of the more powerful inhabitants would join their ranks. They suggested that the organisation of the rebellion must be entrusted with a person acceptable to all the leaders. The deputies indicated that Khan-i-Jah Khan would be the most acceptable and capable of doing the job. Accordingly, the rebel council appointed him as its administrator for the Tamil region, north of the Kaveri. As Marudu Pandyan had assumed the control of rebel organisation in the region south of the Kaveri, the question of finding a leader for the Madurai country did not arise. At the request of Dhoondaji Waug three of the members of the mission agreed to stay in his camp for the purpose of co-ordinating the work of the insurgents of the southern and northern regions. Appaji Gour and Venkataramaniah returned to the south with twenty letters addressed by Dhoondaji Waug to the leaders of Sivaganga, Manamadurai, Madurai, Punasuram, Cheyyar, Erode, Kumarapalayam, Anamalai, Aruvakurichi, Karur, Kangeyam, Perinthurai and Satyamangalam—all rebel centres in Tamilnadu.

The two leaders returned to Muddoor, where they greeted Khan-i-Jah Khan as their leader, and handed over the letters addressed to him. The mission now proceeded to Dindigul. Khan-i-Jah Khan sent his second nephew as his deputy to stay at Virupakshi. The mission reported their experiences to Gopala Nayak, handed over the letters of Dhoondaji Waug and left the deputy of Khan-i-Jah Khan in the camp at Virupakshi. Delighted at the encouraging news, the rebel diplomat sent his own followers to take Appaji Gour and Venkataramaniah to the secret resorts of other chiefs. The agents of the enemy, however, seized a few rebel messengers and the letters sent to Talmalla, but others were securely handed over.³⁹

Written in Kannada, these messages, in the opinion of the English, were addressed to persons who acquired a propensity for commotion and commanded vast influence with the common people. The contents of these letters indicated the advanced stage of the formation of a peninsular confederacy. The rebels were directed to collect contributions for the support of the insurrection,

³⁹ Confession of Appaji Gour, Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5594-9.

assemble armed men every where and to co-ordinate their activities in their districts.⁴⁰

However the trend of the time presented insuperable impediments to the consummation of united endeavour. The British forces, as it had been indicated, defeated the rebels of the north and expelled them to the Maratha Empire. To make their confusion worse confounded, the Maratha army administered a devastating blow. Hard pressed from all quarters, Dhoondaji Waug accompanied by Tomachi Mudali took shelter in the fort of Kolhapur. Before long the insurgents of the north made this place the headquarters of their activity. At the suggestion of Tomachi Mudali, Dhoondaji Waug sent a mission consisting of four Muslims and a Hindu to the far South. These deputies reached Virupakshi on the 28th of April 1800.⁴¹ With the representatives of the Tamil leagues at Kolhapur and the deputies of the Karnataka-Maratha alliances at Virupakshi the confederates proceeded to co-ordinate their strategy.

The interconnecting alliances made by the patriots of an extensive region, reflect the intense diplomatic activity that preceded their formation. It is certain that the patriots, devoted to the nationalist cause as they were, would have led missions to Malabar and Kanara too. But so great is the paucity of historical material that it is impossible to gain a complete and comprehensive account of this formative phase of the movement. Whatever data that are accessible are quite meagre and inadequate. The insurgents conveyed verbal messages from person to person and from village to village. If they carried the written letters, they destroyed them the very moment they suspected the remote possibility of being detected. A few messengers who were apprehended made confessions to the enemy in the course of interrogations; but it is possible that they would have suppressed the vital secrets in the interest of the rebellion and for the benefit of their comrades.

Though the information is scanty, it sheds light upon the political forces at work. If the popular leaders, headmen and traditional chiefs, took the initiative in the organisation of the alliance system of the early period, the peasants of Coimbatore and Salem played the dominant role in bringing the diverse alliances

⁴⁰ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5588-93.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29 May 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 252, pp. 4044-5.

INTERLINKING ALLIANCES IN THE REBEL

CONFEDERACY 1799-1800



MAP II

closer. They led three known missions to the north; of them the last was the most successful. In addition to rebel missions, exchange of representatives, formation of people's committees, correspondence between villages and the meeting of popular assemblies marked the characteristic features of the drift of South India to armed struggle. These developments, significant as they were, wrought a marvellous transformation of the alliance system. They infused unity into diverse organisations of the insurgents and brought the two streams of the movement of the south and of the north under a common banner of the Peninsular Confederacy.

Consolidation of the Confederacy

Extension of the sphere of activity synchronised with a determined endeavour made by the patriots for the consolidation of the confederacy. The working of the political forces that led to the organisation of the Peninsular Confederacy culminated in an alliance between Marudu Pandyan and Dhoondaji Waug. They exchanged representatives and established a correspondence with each other. The alliance of these two leaders imparted a fresh vigour to the movement. For long the English entertained no suspicion about the defiant activities of Marudu because of his tactful policy of formal loyalty to the Company. But in June 1800 Collector Hurdis and Captain Leod discovered that Marudu had already entered into union with Dhoondaji Waug. Thereupon the Madras Council sent *hircarrahs* to Sivaganga, posted confidential agents at centres of rebel communication and watched the movements of his people with redoubled vigour. It is not certain whether Marudu received any immediate information about the vigilance instituted by the enemy. However he proceeded to strengthen the confederate cause. He sent his armed men to Tirunelveli to explore the possibility of working out the release of the relatives of Kattabomman⁴² imprisoned at Palayamkottai, and sent his deputies to the centres of rebel activity in the north and maintained his intimate relations with the leaders of Kannadanadu.⁴³ The *hircarrahs*

⁴² Marudu's agents endeavoured to bribe the guards of the fort of Palayamkottai, where the rebels were imprisoned, but were caught and executed. (Board of Revenue, March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 277, p. 2835).

⁴³ Lushington, 13 July 1801, Report, Tinnevely Collectorate records, No. 3579, pp. 50-55.

reported to the Company that in January 1800 large bodies of armed men⁴⁴ joined the camp of Dhoondaji Waug and that among them they saw numerous Tamil veterans.⁴⁵ It has not been possible to ascertain whether these Tamils were sent by the southern allies or whether they went on their own accord. The missions which Dhoondaji Waug sent elsewhere for gaining allies received cordial response. After gaining the alliance of the Rajah of Kolhapur, he sent his emissaries to the Andhra region, held by the Nizam.⁴⁶ The *sardars* in the service of the Nizam promised their aid⁴⁷ and the chief of Anagundi, a descendant of the Emperor of Vijayanagar joined the alliance.⁴⁸ The rulers of Sholapur and Raydroog and the Scindia of Gwalior too extended their support to the rebels. Dhoondaji Waug stationed Giridhar Rao as his representative in the court of the Scindia. Two factors, his opposition to the English and rivalry with the Peshwa, prevailed on Daulat Rao Scindia in joining the camp of the rebels. The conflicts among the Maratha chieftains greatly assisted the insurgents in consolidating their influence on the border region of the Maratha Empire.⁴⁹ The rebel success in gaining allies in the northern and eastern regions extended the sphere of the Confederacy deep into Maratha land and Andhradesa.

With the patriots of the south and of the north of the Peninsula united in a confederacy against a common foe, the insurgents of the territories lying in between these two spheres were drawn into it. The sons of Tipu Sultan languishing in the fort of Vellore had established a secret communication with the people of Mysore. Futtah Hyder, the eldest among them, appeared to possess the remarkable qualities of his father, for he combined in himself ambition and independence. He employed Roy Royen as his agent in Mysore, established through him a secret correspondence and

⁴⁴ Madras Council, 18 February 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 265, p. 858.

⁴⁵ Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, p. 581.

⁴⁶ Madras Council, 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 465.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 30 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 317.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7 August 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, p. 1952 and Arthur Wellesly, 30 September 1800, letter to Madras, Military Miscellany, Vol. 67, p. 333.

⁴⁹ Madras Council, 6 September 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 703 and Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, p. 583.

induced the people to join the rebel Confederacy.⁵⁰ This had the desired effect. The inhabitants of Mysore particularly the disbanded troops and the Muslims rallied to the rebel standard of Gopala Nayak and Dhoondaji Waug. The headmen of the villages turned into active rebels. Many of the irregular peons took service with the leagues bringing arms with them,⁵¹ while others assisted the emissaries and contributed funds for the organisation of resistance.⁵² Early in 1800 the agents of the Company apprehended an emissary sent by Futteh Hyder to the camp of Dhoondaji Waug. Though no letter could be detected, the interrogation revealed that he was directed to convey to Dhoondaji Waug a message with a purport: 'God had favoured him (Dhoondaji Waug) and made him the supporter of the cause of the unfortunate and say that I pray constantly for his success and to him alone I look up to as the person destined by God to relieve me'.⁵³ As a prisoner of consequence, closely watched, Futteh Hyder could do nothing more than the expression of a wish, in his interest too, in his message to Dhoondaji Waug, but what he did in Mysore in the exercise of his influence substantially assisted the rebel cause.

The inhabitants of Malabar, Kanara and Bel country came under the influence both of the Tamil and Kannada wings of the Confederacy. Kerala Varma again emerged as the leader of the insurgents of Malabar. In 1799 the English discovered the correspondence between Dhoondaji Waug and Kerala Varma. They exchanged messages, stationed emissaries and co-ordinated their strategy through frequent consultations.⁵⁴ The insurgents of Tamilnadu visited Malabar and it was possible that they would have persuaded Kerala Varma, who made a compromise with the Company in 1798, to return to their ranks. The Madras Council held a view that the Tamil leagues persuaded the inhabitants of the Malabar Coast to join the rebellion.⁵⁵ This was rendered possible because of the close relation that existed between the patriots of Coimbatore and of the West Coast and the geographical

⁵⁰ Secret Sundries for 1799-1801, Vol. 22, pp. 295-9.

⁵¹ Board of Revenue, 2 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 253, pp. 4754-6.

⁵² Secret Sundries for 1799-1801, Vol. 20, p. 198.

⁵³ Confession of a messenger, Secret Sundries for 1799-1800, Vol. 22, pp. 410 and 468.

⁵⁴ Secret Sundries for 1799-1800, Vol. 20, p. 197.

⁵⁵ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3445.

contiguity. The insurgents of Malabar did not remain content with the limitation of their activity to the region west of the Ghats. On the other hand they assisted the rebels of Tamilnadu in times of necessity. The English records tell us that early in 1801 a hundred armed men from Malabar led by a *sherogar* or a military chief crossed a river, mentioned as Madapuri, and went to Dindigul to assist the Tamil patriots.⁵⁶

Interlinking alliances made the Confederacy formidable. The Kanara League associated itself with the main stream of the movement, when Krishnappa Nayak and Dhoondaji Waug agreed on mutual co-operation.⁵⁷ Yadul Nayak of Delli who was allied with Gopala Nayak forged ties with the insurgents of Kannadanaadu.⁵⁸ Marudu Pandyan and Gopala Nayak merged their rebel leagues into a common union. This significant step promoted the co-ordination of rebel activity in Tamilnadu.⁵⁹ Independent of this union of interests, Gopala Nayak entered into agreements with the chieftains of Tirunelveli. With the execution of Kattabomman, the poligars had been left leaderless. The armed men who were employed by the Tirunelveli League and sheltered by Marudu had already enlisted themselves in the service of the Dindigul rebels. This development coupled with the success made in regaining the support of the poligars of Tirunelveli greatly strengthened the rebel cause in the southern region of Tamilnadu.⁶⁰

Though the movement was escalating, the patriots took pains to give no inkling about it to the enemy. They professed formal loyalty to the Company when the situation called for it, held their conferences in the woods and took adequate precautions on the advice of their *hircarrahs* when they resorted to any forward step to strengthen their position. Though the English posted troops at strategic places, employed agents, and obtained the services of the princes, they did not realise the real implications of the alliance system nor unearth the lurking danger. So subtle were the devices employed by the patriots that the Company entertained for a long time wrong or incorrect or superficial notions. On the 14th of

⁵⁶ Board of Revenue, February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, p. 1872.

⁵⁷ *Marquess Wellesley's Dispatches*, Vol. 2, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Board of Revenue, February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, p. 1869.

⁵⁹ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3497-3501.

⁶⁰ Board of Revenue, February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, pp. 1871-2.

February 1800 when the Peninsular Confederacy was in an advanced stage of formation Colonel Arthur Wellesly, Commander of the British forces in Mysore, reported to the Madras Council: 'Within these few days intelligence has been given to me from different quarters of Dhoondaji Waug's plots and designs upon this country, and some of his agents and emissaries have been pointed out. But having made enquiries into the truth of the reports which have been made to me, and which are in general circulation, I cannot find that there is any foundation for them'.⁶¹ Thus the impressions gained by the administration during this period did not indicate a correct appraisal of the situation. On the 7th of February 1801 Collector Hurdis reported to the Board of Revenue on the identity of interests of the insurgents of Tirunelveli and Dindigul and the probable extension of this union to the Coast of Malabar.⁶² Again on the 17th February he reiterated the existence of a strong union of the rebels of Dindigul and southern Tamilnadu.⁶³ The sudden and widespread outbreaks had taken the British administration so completely by surprise that its reports betrayed its total ignorance of what led to the rebellion. On the 1st of June 1801 Collector Lushington in reference to the outbreaks reported to Lieutenant Colonel Agnew: 'These outrageous proceedings have no parallel in the history of these countries nor can there be any case of flagrant rebellion so destitute of every circumstance to palliate its offensive nature'.⁶⁴ However, towards the end of the year 1801 the Madras Council obtained a clearer picture. On the 15th of October Edward Clive reported to the Court of Directors that the rebellion had been organised by a confederacy of rebels of an extensive region which included the southern provinces and the western territories of the Peninsula.⁶⁵ Yet the Company did not realise how such an extensive confederacy could be organised. It wrongly attributed the

⁶¹ Arthur Wellesly, 14 February 1800, Report to Madras, Military Consultations, Vol. 265, p. 857.

⁶² T. B. Hurdis, 7 February 1801, report to Board of Revenue, Proceedings of the Board, Vol. 274, p. 1861.

⁶³ T. B. Hurdis, 17 February 1801, report to Board of Revenue, Proceedings of the Board, Vol. 275, p. 2570.

⁶⁴ Tinnevely Collector Records, No. 3579, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Edward Clive, 15 October 1801, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 31, p. 157.

formation of the union to Dhoondaji Waug and the poligars. Guided by wrong reports, the Madras Council on the 21st of December 1801 reported to the Bengal Council: 'The emissaries of the late Dhoondaji Waug had extended to the southern provinces of the Carnatic their endeavour to excite the tributaries of the British Government to resist its authority and to unite their interests with those of that daring insurgent. . . .'⁶⁶ These views of diverse implications indicate that the Company never made a realistic and definite assessment of the movement. This official failure appears, to a large extent, responsible for the historians' failure to shed light on this remarkable struggle, launched by South India at the dawn of British imperialism in India.

A three tier link-system contributed to the solidarity of the Peninsular Confederacy. At the lowest level it was an alliance of the common people, represented by an understanding between the chieftains and the village headmen. At the intermediate stage the union was strengthened by an alliance between one regional leader and another, as between Marudu Pandyan and Gopala Nayak. As the final stage a regional chief entered into an agreement with a member of the regional league. This kind of union was cemented or promoted by the exchange of letters, posting of vakeels and occasional deliberations. It cannot be ascertained whether all the leaders met in any common conference. Historical records do not clarify that they adopted this procedure. However, it is certain that their emissaries held discussions normally in thick jungles, while the principal leaders devoted themselves to organisational work.

The formation of the Confederacy must be reckoned as a spectacular achievement of the patriots. It epitomised the great political awakening of the masses. The common people and their leaders, unaided by any ruler, organised themselves against the common enemy for a determined struggle. The leadership of the movement devolved upon Marudu Pandyan and Dhoondaji Waug; both of whom had risen to eminence from the lowest ranks of the society and symbolised the aspirations of the masses. The second line of leadership went to Gopala Nayak, Khan-i-Jah Khan, Kerala Varma and Krishnappa Nayak, either chiefs by tradition

⁶⁶ Madras Council, 21 December 1801, letter to Bengal, Political Consultations, Vol. 5, p. 1638.

or leaders by acquiescence. A few of the second-rank leaders, belonged to the order of the poligars. As chieftains by tradition and as ryots among the ryots, they represented the common people. The peasants furnished the armed men to the rebel leagues. It was singular that they organised a rebellion on an extensive scale at the height of the British military might in South India. All the independent powers had been liquidated and all the allied princes had been reduced into traitors. Though there survived a few of the powerful princes, not a solitary one of them dared to identify his interests with the nationalists. On the contrary, all of them seemed inclined to fight the patriots. A combination of these factors imparted a popular character to the entire movement.

Concept of Freedom

The rebel literature, though scanty, is valuable as it sheds light upon the exalted political concepts which drove the patriots into the arena of conflict. The letters of Marudu Pandyan of Sivaganga, Sevathiah of Tirunelveli and Ezhambalam Kunjan of Malabar, which the English intercepted, give interesting glimpses into the rebels' interpretation of the political trends of the times.

The patriots asserted that the English violating the faith, that was reposed in them by the people, and flouting the national customs of the inhabitants, established their authority over the country and enslaved its population. Such a calamity overtook the land because of the treachery of the princes, indifference of the inhabitants and the duplicity of the Europeans. As a result the country lost its independence, poverty afflicted the population and imperialism threatened to overwhelm the rest of India. The only remedy lay in the total destruction of the political authority of the English and subjugation of them to dependent status. To attain this end, armed struggle was the only alternative. However the inhabitants could gain no easy victory, as the princes had turned traitors and the English appeared formidable. These difficulties, though real, were not insuperable. They could be tackled by popular unity and guerilla warfare. Success in these ventures would liberate the occupied territories, forestall the fall of the rest of India and enable the inhabitants to live in perpetual happiness and prosperity. All inhabitants, thereupon, would enjoy their

rights, get the means of livelihood and live free from all anxiety. The extermination of British domination would lead to the restoration of princely authority to its exalted status and it would be balanced by the poligari system and the village community. In consequence all could enjoy the rights to which they were entitled under the established customs of the land.⁶⁷

Daring and dynamic, these political concepts seem unsurpassed. They reflected the popular reaction to the political and economic tragedy that afflicted them and anxiety to extricate themselves from the evil. Inspired by an all India concept, the rebels were determined to set their land free and to prevent the fall of the rest of the sub-continent to alien sway. They recognised no frontiers; neither of creed, nor of community nor language except that of entire Jumbu Dweepa. The translation of the political and revolutionary principles into practice would have ultimately led to the possibility of attaining a system of federalism, based upon checks and balances. As the rebels recognised no supreme political authority, the Confederacy that symbolised the unity and represented the solidarity of all the regional leagues, would have occupied the place of the national government, as the Continental Congress did when the Thirteen Colonies of North America revolted. Monarchy was the accepted form of government; no wonder the patriots advocated it. The princes would have regained their status in their respective states but their authority would have been checked and balanced by the poligari system, representing the aristocracy and village community, representing the masses. However, it cannot be denied that as the regional leagues of the rebels would have continued to function in one form or the other, the monarchy stood the possibility of being transformed into a constitutional institution. The interaction between the regional leagues, on the one hand, and poligari system and the village community, on the other, would have decided whether the former body would have changed into a representative and democratic institution to occupy the role of a legislature. If these concepts, though progressive, give an incomplete picture of how the polity ought to be, it is perhaps because of a want of the full data on the political

⁶⁷ Revenue Sundries, Vol. 26, p. 448.

Madras Council, 9 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, p. 4296 and Diary of the Collector of Cotiote for 1800, p. 111.

philosophy of the insurgents. If they lacked clarity and proved defective, they could have been rectified through working, depending upon the attitude of the ruled.

It would have been self-defeating if the patriots sought to compromise with the rising tide of imperialism. Reconciliation with the enemy offered no possibility of liberating the land from foreign rule. As realists, the patriots advocated the destruction of British power. When the English were dealing only with the princes and when there was no contact between the former and the masses, unity of the inhabitants and violent struggle presented the sole means for the rectification of the political malady.

As a reaction against western imperialism and princely collusion the Peninsular Confederacy symbolised a self-strengthening movement. The inhabitants found themselves undefended and weak against the aggressive forces, which subverted their political and economic rights. To get rid of this embarrassment they sought to strengthen themselves by accepting a dynamic leadership, drawn from the peasants, in the place of the princely order, and by promoting a bond of unity that transcended the barriers presented by communal, linguistic and religious distinctions. It does not appear that there had been diverse opinions on how the situation could be faced. Whether the inhabitants cherished any moderate view, cannot be ascertained. All leaders of influence were committed to the goal of national independence and to violence as the means of attaining it. In fact the movement represented a radical objective.

CHAPTER V

DINDIGUL CONSPIRACY AND OUTBREAK OF REBELLION

THE CONFESSIONS made by the rebels whom the enemy captured as prisoners, letters of the leaders seized from their emissaries, and reports furnished by the servants of the Company establish that the confederates evolved a strategy, a common plan of action, for the destruction of the British power and liberation of the country. This marked the culmination of a long series of intrigues and conspiracies. However for want of full data on rebel versions it is neither possible to obtain a complete picture of the design nor to ascertain who took the lead in working it out. Perhaps it emerged by a slow process through a common endeavour. Nevertheless, what is significant is that it symbolised the triumph of confederate co-ordination and solidarity. The allied rebel powers equipped themselves for the struggle and decided to launch a simultaneous insurrection. A conspiracy held at Dindigul decided the date for a surprise attack on the British stronghold of Coimbatore and the beginning of a general offensive. A bold venture was accordingly made for taking this fort, but it proved abortive. However, the outbreaks which came in the wake of the attack on Coimbatore marked the beginning of the Rebellion.

Rebel Strategy

As violent struggle seemed inevitable, the patriots, as their assertions indicate, gave due consideration to the military might of the enemy. They knew that the English had vanquished Mysore, crippled the Marathas, suppressed the auxiliary powers, maintained well equipped forces throughout the country and controlled the sea. As the masters of an extensive empire, the enemy held vast resources and commanded the loyalty of the princes. On the other hand they, themselves, had neither the training nor the equipment nor the material potential needed to fight the powerful aliens. To overcome these serious handicaps in a confrontation with the imperialists the insurgents decided to rely upon two

factors: unity, which they sought to promote among the ranks of the people, and guerilla tactics that they contemplated as the method of warfare. Sevathiah of Tirunelveli declared that as the people of the different countries habitually submitted to the Europeans, the latter ruled over them. Had the inhabitants risen and resisted, the aliens would have sunk and perished.¹ Marudu Pandyan called upon the inhabitants to unite together, to rise in arms, to display their bravery in the battle with the English and to attain immortal renown.² A Malabar letter appealed to the patriots to unite together in the name of religion and gods for the preservation of their political rights.³ In fact the ideal of unity hovered over the political scene of the South and the leaders of the movement declared that it was indispensable for their final victory. Secondly, the confederates, cool and calculating as they were, recognised their handicap in fighting pitched battles with the well-equipped and regular forces of the English. Seeking no rash adventure, they rightly advocated guerilla tactics. Marudu Pandyan declared: 'By the support of the jungle harass the enemy and set it at defiance'.⁴ Sevathiah in his letter to the Rajah of Thanjavur disclosed: 'We would never risk any pitched battle but attack the British troops unobserved in the night, when they would sit for their food'.⁵ Covered with thorny bushes and thick woods, the terrain of the mountainous country where the confederacy established its influence, appeared excellently suited for guerilla war. The Amildar of Oroor in Ramnad, who was engaged in gathering intelligence from the camps of the rebels, reported to the Company that the confederates had decided to embark upon a universal and simultaneous struggle throughout the country. This strategy represented an outcome of the interplay of their two principles of unity and violence. They asserted that when the enemy was challenged simultaneously in all directions, its attention would be so

¹ Sevathiah, letter to Serfoji, Military Consultations, 9 June 1801, Vol. 284, p. 4296.

² Marudu Pandyan, Srirangam Proclamation, Revenue Sundries, 16 June 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 453-4.

³ Diary of the Collector of Cotiote for 1800, p. 111.

⁴ Amildar of Oroor, 18 March 1801, Report to Lushington, Board of Revenue Proceedings, Vol. 291, p. 8733.

⁵ Sevathiah, letter to Serfoji, Military Consultations, 9 June 1801, Vol. 284, p. 4296.

distracted that it would be prevented from concentrating its striking power upon any particular quarter. Its troops would be so spread out and posts would be so exposed that they would be rendered quite vulnerable to insurgent assaults. In fact the essence of rebel strategy, as far as it can be discerned from the available data, consisted of forcing the hostile army to deploy over a wide area so as to enable the rebels to seek and destroy them without much hazard.⁶ However it cannot be denied that the success of this design depended upon the willingness of the enemy not to concentrate its man-power and material resources in one quarter or the other.

The leaders of the Confederacy took over the command of the anticipated campaigns against the English in their respective regions: Marudu Pandyan in Madurai, Gopala Nayak in Dindigul-Tiruchirapalli, Khan-i-Jah Khan in Coimbatore-Salem, Kerala Varma in Malabar, Krishnappa Nayak in West Mysore and Dhoondaji Waug in the northern region of Kannadanadu and beyond. The principal leaders entered into arrangements with the local chiefs. Marudu entrusted the control of operations in Ramnad with Muthu Karuppa Tevar and in Thanjavur with Gnanamuthu.⁷ Gopala Nayak directed Appaji Gour, Neelappa Gour, Kari Tambi and Venkataramaniah to assemble bands of armed men in Satyamangalam and to begin depredations, taking advantage of the mountains to shelter them. Khan-i-Jah Khan in command of a large body of rebels established himself in the hills of Virupakshi in Dindigul for launching an offensive towards Coimbatore.⁸ The chiefs of Malabar held two conferences at Peria of which Kerala Varma attended the first. This council of rebels distributed responsibility among the leaders in the interest of effective operations: Rendatara was entrusted with Kunhyami Mopilla, Kottayattu with Ezhambalam Kunjan, Iruvinad with Kanjot Nambiar and Kyderi Kutti Ambu, Wynaad with Edatara Kunjan and Kartinat with Chan-

⁶ Report of the Amildar of Oroor, Board of Revenue, July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 291, pp. 8732-3 and Marudu's Proclamation, Revenue Sundries, 16 June 1801, Vol. 26, p. 448.

⁷ Madras Council, 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7754.

⁸ Confession of Appaji Gour, Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5594-9.

goteri Ambu.⁹ Krishnappa Nayak of the Bel country formulated a scheme of co-operation with Vittel Hegeda, Subba Rao and Mahtab Khan in Kanara.¹⁰ It does not appear that Dhoondaji Waug carried into effect a similar distribution of functions. His moves indicate that he retained with himself the direct command of the campaigns in the north but co-operated with the Rajahs of Kolhapur and Sholapur and the poligars of border region of Andhradesa.

Drift to the Struggle

The insurgents intensified their preparations for the impending struggle with their success in forming the Confederacy. In the far south Marudu Pandyan and his associated leaders prepared for the most obstinate resistance. They united themselves with every disaffected chief, drew all the inhabitants from the villages, equipped them with fire arms and assembled a formidable body of armed men in the jungles of Kalayarkoil. As Rana Pratap Singh did in his war against the Mughal legions of Emperor Akbar, the rebels with grim determination trusted themselves entirely to the recesses of the jungles.¹¹ After establishing their sheltered posts on the hills, they destroyed the forts on the plains of Sivaganga to prevent the enemy from converting them into its own strongholds.¹² As the country was famine-stricken at this time the patriots found it impossible to procure food grain. To overcome this embarrassment they employed doneys (*donies*) and imported foodgrain together with arms through the Bay of Tondi.¹³ It is not possible to ascertain from which particular source they obtained supplies. The Tamils had maintained commercial relations with Ceylon, Burma and Bengal. The arrival of the vessels both from the south and the north indicate that the rebels made the imports from Ceylon and the coast extending to Bengal. Probably they got supplies from eastern countries too.¹⁴ Powder and balls manufactured in the villages and grain procured from the peasants complemented

⁹ Kanjote Nambiar, n.d. translation of a palm leaf letter to Wilson, Diary of the Collector of Cotiote, 1800, pp. 141-2.

¹⁰ Madras Council, 24 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 274-7.

¹¹ Ibid., 22 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, p. 4607.

¹² Ibid., 7 July 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, pp. 4966.

¹³ Board of Revenue, July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 291, p. 8737.

¹⁴ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, pp. 115-117.

imports. Old weapons were repaired. Directed by Vella Marudu, the elder brother of Marudu Pandyan, all supplies were sent to the jungles and laid at hidden places. Before long Kalayarkoil was developed into a great arsenal. The leaders summoned the rebels from the villages and instructed them to remain ready but out of sight, so that the struggle could be launched in full force on the first signal.¹⁵ Marudu employed numerous spies and ascertained the military strength of the enemy in the far South. Reports indicated that the English had stationed one battalion of troops at Panjalamkurichi and Kayattar and not more than two companies in Ramnad. It was anticipated that they might despatch three or four battalions from Tiruchirapalli against the insurgents of Madurai region but Marudu Pandyan declared with confidence that 'Though twelve battalions should march against Sivaganga, they could venture to engage the enemy and set it at defiance' with the support of jungles and simultaneous outbreaks in other territories.¹⁶

In Dindigul the Company's administration had established a system of reward to those, who gave information about the transportation of fire arms.¹⁷ Because of the risk involved in the detection of imports, the patriots started making arms and ammunition in the woods. They established two factories for the manufacture of light weapons in the jungles of Melur and Taramangalam.¹⁸ The rebels made it a common practice to keep large quantities of arms buried in their fields so that they could prevent detection and dig them out on the outbreak of disturbances.¹⁹

The Company had imposed a ban on the traffic of arms, ammunition and other warlike stores in Malabar ever since it established its authority. Yet the inhabitants countered this restriction through a contraband introduction of arms from the foreign countries by the sea and land.²⁰ They dug trenches around the villages, fortified them with palisades and gateways. As Diwan

¹⁵ Amildar of Palamaneri, 23 March 1801, trans., letter to the Board of Revenue, Board Proceedings, Vol. 291, pp. 8743-5.

¹⁶ Amildar of Oroor, 18 March 1801, report to Lushington, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 76.

¹⁷ Board of Revenue, July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 291, p. 8749.

¹⁸ Ibid., 28, December 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 305, pp. 15350-55.

¹⁹ Ibid., July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 291, p. 8707.

²⁰ Madras Council, 24 April 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, p. 717.

Purnea of Mysore had reported to the Company, they made paths through the jungles and posted a hundred to two hundred armed men in every post.²¹ The patriots of the western region of Kannadanadu carried into effect systematic preparations for the impending crisis. They were assisted in this venture by the sepoys who had received training when they were in the service of Tipu or of the Company.²² The villages raised contributions, usually five per cent of the *circar* revenue, for the equipment of armed bodies. Large villages sent 200 to 300 men, while small villages less in proportion to their population for service to the rebel cause. The leaders bound them into a united force by oaths of secrecy and loyalty. They proceeded in this manner by stages until they armed the inhabitants of a large part of Kanara.²³ These preparations made simultaneously in different places according to a set pattern indicated the successful implementation of a concerted scheme. The Bel country because of stupendous swellings and natural rises of the earth and extensive forests appeared well suited as a rebel resort. Numerous posts were raised in the thick jungles. The roads which were extremely narrow and rugged were defended by barriers, well stockaded, each having a very deep entrenchment, over which trees were loosely thrown as means of communication for the defendants, yet removable at pleasure. All the fortified places were strengthened and secret paths built. From the interior of the fort of Eygoor pathways were laid to the woods: the principal of which were from the north-east and west-south-west—the former leading by a steep descent through a narrow sugarcane field, bounded on each side by a thick jungle and the latter by a causeway of three to four feet in breadth to a hill, difficult of access.²⁴ The records do not shed light upon the kind of preparations which Dhoondaji Waug made. As he had already gathered a large body of armed men, it seems that he bestowed his attention more on gaining allies.

Dindigul Conspiracy

As the preparations for the struggle had been carried into effect, the patriots had to decide the venue and date for its com-

²¹ Ibid., 13 March 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 3, pp. 397-8.

²² Board of Revenue, 3 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, pp. 5717-8.

²³ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 257, pp. 6311-12.

²⁴ Madras Council, 12 April 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 267, pp. 2125-35.

mencement. Towards the end of April 1800 the deputies of the rebel leagues reached Virupakshi in Dindigul. It is not known from whom the initiative to summon this meeting came. Nevertheless it represented a spontaneous expression of the much cherished objective of the confederates. The date of this conspiracy is not specifically indicated. It appears that it was held on the 29th of April 1800, for the deputies of Dhoondaji Waug, who represented the Kannada wing of the Confederacy reached the place on the 28th²⁵ and left on their return journey on the 30th, with the conclusion of the deliberations. The rebel diplomat Gopala Nayak presided over the Council.²⁶ The Dindigul Conspiracy constitutes a land-mark in the movement not only because the two wings of the Confederacy participated in this common meeting but also because the decisions it adopted were of consequence in deciding the course of events that followed.

The Rebel Council adopted important resolutions. It decided to launch a general offensive against the British with the storming of Coimbatore. To attain this objective the Dindigul League was directed to send rebel columns against this stronghold of the enemy.²⁷ Khan-i-Jah Khan at the command of 4,000 horse agreed to reach by the pass of Gujalgutty in support of the insurgent column of Dindigul.²⁸ Dhoondaji Waug undertook to send an expedition to Coimbatore to reinforce the confederates of the south. Marudu Pandyan and his associates consented to wait for the appearance of 'horse', which in the view of the English, had reference only to the cavalry of Dhoondaji Waug, in Coimbatore. The rebels of the southern districts were to take it as a signal and to rise in arms immediately.²⁹ Thus the patriots worked out in detail an elaborate plan for launching a full scale rebellion. The attack on Coimbatore was to usher in a general insurrection throughout the country and expulsion of the imperial rulers from the land.

²⁵ Board of Revenue, 29 May 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 252, pp. 4044-5.

²⁶ B. Hurdis, 8 June 1800, Report to the Board of Revenue, Individual Papers, No. 34.

²⁷ Board of Revenue, February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, p. 1869.

²⁸ Confession of Appaji Gour, Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, p. 5599.

²⁹ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3497-3501.

The confederates wisely decided to capture Coimbatore to mark the beginning of the Rebellion. It occupied a strategic location in the valley, situated between the extensive hill tracts of the south-east and those of the north-west, dominated by the rebels. The possession of this town and its fort appeared essential not only for the destruction of British influence in this part of the country but also in the interest of maintaining the communications between Tamilnadu and Kannadanadu and of co-ordinating the operations of the two wings of the Confederacy. Indirectly the decision of the conspirators indicated the ascendancy that the patriots of Coimbatore gained in the Rebel Council as the result of the conspicuous role that they played as the architects of the grand alliance.

The Rebel Council in Dindigul decided to attack Coimbatore on the 3rd of June 1800, to destroy the Fifth Regiment that garrisoned the fort under the command of Lieutenant Colonel K. Macalister and launch the offensive. The rank and file of the Fifth Regiment of British Cavalry consisted mostly of Mohammadan sepoys, officered by the English.³⁰ The conspirators planned to call forth their armed columns from the villages and move them to the hills situated near Coimbatore, and directed Shaik Hussain to take over the command of the storming parties. They decided on the 3rd of June 1800 as the appointed day for assault, as it was the last day of the Muharram Feast, when the elder Muslim sepoys would be away and the younger sepoys would be busy with the celebration of the feast and incapable of any sustained action, being overcome with fatigue in consequence of their busy engagements for all the previous nine days and nights. As Lieutenant Colonel Macalister, commander of the garrison, himself asserted subsequently it was '... the most favourable moment for carrying such a diabolical scheme into effect'. The conspirators decided to attack and destroy the exhausted regiment late in that night, when it would go on a procession around the town and occupy the fort.³¹ The local residents volunteered to serve as guides and offered to extend every possible assistance.³² The insurgents, thus, took all needed precautions for the successful execution of the plot.

³⁰ Madras Council, 11 June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 18.

³¹ K. Macalister, report to Madras, Political Consultations, 11 June 1800, Vol. 1, p. 18.

³² Board of Revenue, 23 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, p. 5767.

Unconcerted Outbreaks

The patriots evolved an effective plan of action but the premature outbreaks, which the English precipitated quite unwittingly when the delegates of the confederates of the north were on their way to Dindigul, threw the rebel strategy out of gear. For long the Company was concerned at the growth of turbulent spirit in the West Coast and the defiant posture of the chieftains. This not only prevented the settlement of the country under its authority but threatened to spread and expose these territories, as Governor General Mornington asserted, to '... the most serious dangers from the attempts of the foreign powers'.³³ To curb this potential threat to the security of the British Empire Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Wellesley was directed to equip a detachment consisting of the forces of the Company and of Mysore. The first target was Bellum. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Tolfrey, the expedition moving through paddy fields, sugar plantations, jungles and hills advanced on Eygoor, one of the rebel strongholds of Krishnappa Nayak, on the 30th of March 1800. As their attempt to draw the insurgents into an action failed, the invaders set fire to the forest. On the 1st of April the forces threatened Arisikarai. From their sheltered positions in the jungles, the insurgents launched a surprise attack and threw the assailants into disorder. On the 6th of April the enemy occupied Saglipur, situated near Munserabad. However as more bodies of rebels appeared in strength Tolfrey found it prudent to retreat.³⁴ The Company now assembled an army at Srirangapatnam for the suppression of the League of Malabar but abandoned the venture in view of the serious turn of rebel activity in the northern territories.³⁵

The English never gained any victory over the rebels of Bellum and never understood the implications of what they did. Yet it had an unexpected impact upon the attitude of the allied rebel leagues. Bound by an accepted plan of action, the confederates had undertaken to distract the attention of the enemy and to so embarrass it by simultaneous outbreaks in different territories so

³³ Lord Mornington, 26 May 1800, letter to Edward Clive, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, p. 3572.

³⁴ Madras Council, 12 April 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 267, pp. 2125-35.

³⁵ Ibid., 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 311.

as to compel it to spread out its troops, not only to afford relief to the besieged comrades, but also to enable them destroy its forces. Added to this, the control of the strategic mountain passes of Bellum seemed essential for sending the expedition to Coimbatore. Therefore, as the British troops took the field against the insurgents of Bellum, the restless and turbulent Dhoondaji Waug threw his columns into the arena of strife before his delegates returned from Dindigul. When the tidings of this unanticipated crisis reached the allied rebel powers of the south, though it came at variance with their strategy, they too allowed themselves to be drawn into the field. By a supreme irony of providence the Confederacy thus swiftly but imperceptibly drifted into a premature conflict with the British Empire.

It was not probable that Dhoondaji Waug had decided to rise in arms before his delegates left his camp for their journey to Dindigul. Because of difficult and unreliable communications he would have taken several days to obtain intelligence of the British invasion of Bellum. The conspirators too would have started early because of the dangers on the road. Otherwise the rebel chief would have conveyed his instructions for early outbreaks in April instead of in June as it was decided in Dindigul. However it cannot be denied that the hurry with which the emissaries left Dindigul indicate that they would have received at least vague reports either on their way or upon their arrival at Virupakshi. If they agreed to a later date for the plot on Coimbatore, it was either because of want of direction or in the interest of expediency, for time was needed to rush succour from the north.

In April 1800 as the British forces threatened the rebels of Bellum, Dhoondaji Waug raised the banner of revolt. He left his strongholds in Serrapore, where he had taken shelter for long and assisted by the Rajahs of Sholapur and Kolhapur, embarked upon an extensive campaign against the enemy and its allies. The insurgents stormed the fort of Guddack and attacked Kittoor and Beetguee. Emboldened by these successes, the armed columns advanced to Raichur Doab in the territory of the Nizam, an ally of the enemy, and occupied Dumbal.³⁶ After consolidating their hold over the territories in the Maratha-Kannada region, the rebel cavalry moved in force to Savanore to the south for an expedition

³⁶ Ibid., 22 April 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 268, p. 2380.

through Mysore to commence operations in concert with the confederates of the south.³⁷ This was followed by the outbreaks in the western region of Kannadanadu. Krishnappa Nayak began depredations into Kanara and Mysore and intercepted British communications with the West Coast. In May 1800 he expelled the British troops from Jerrah and erected barriers.³⁸ Malabar drifted swiftly into the struggle. The situation arising from rebel intrigues took so ominous a turn that the Madras Council expressed its deep anxiety that many serious calamities might follow from the desultory warfare that would probably commence, the termination of which would be very uncertain owing to the great extent of the woody country both above and below the Ghats, combined with the degree of influence that Kerala Varma possessed and the advantages which he would have from the nature of the terrain that would materially lead to the destruction of the regular troops of the Company.³⁹ The rebel prince summoned the people to arms and resumed operations for the expulsion of the Company's troops. The armed bands of Kottayattu made inroads into Patanoor, Meatady and Cowoor. Aided by the inhabitants of Hobili they moved to Tekkangari⁴⁰ and threatened the British stronghold of Manatana.⁴¹ As Governor General Mornington wrote to Governor Clive, the spirit of opposition and independence had manifested itself along the northern region of Mysore, in Kanara and Malabar and threatened to extend itself along the whole line of the possessions of the English and the Rajah of Mysore on the western side of the Peninsula.⁴²

Confederates of the south commenced hostilities to synchronise with the outbreaks in the north. The rebels of Dindigul assembled at Virupakshi, as the British administration itself had admitted 'for the purpose of co-operating' with the insurgents of the north, led by Dhoondaji Waug.⁴³ Early in May rebels led by Mohammad

³⁷ Ibid., 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 465.

³⁸ Ibid., 3 June 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, p. 3258.

³⁹ Ibid., 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 299.

⁴⁰ Diary of R. Hodgson, 1800, p. 107.

⁴¹ Diary of the Collector of Cotiote, 23 July 1800, p. 1.

⁴² Lord Mornington, 1 July 1800, letter to Edward Clive, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, pp. 3569-88.

⁴³ Board of Revenue, 18 February 1801, Report to Madras, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 107, p. 228.

Hasham threatened Dharapuram, while numerous armed groups moved to Talamalla and Satyamangalam.⁴⁴ On the 30th of May a detachment of the Company commanded by Captain Jones engaged the insurgents in a surprise encounter at Satyamangalam, but the latter withdrew to the hills of Aripalayam.⁴⁵ The patriots of the Madurai region proceeded cautiously, for they felt it essential to wait for the appearance of the cavalry from the north as it had been expected. Yet Marudu Pandyan despatched parties to Ramnad to reinforce the columns of Melappan.⁴⁶ More groups of armed men moved from Dindigul and Sivaganga to Tirunelveli to organise the armed bodies and to assist in the escape of Oomathurai and other relatives of Kattabomman from Palayamkottai. They sought to work out the escape of prisoners but on hearing that the latter were afflicted with small-pox, postponed the execution of the design.⁴⁷ In defiance of British authority the rebels of Ramnad built a cutcherry at Pandikudi and organised a parallel administration with Muthukaruppa Tevar as the rebel ruler. The inhabitants of Kallarnadu too raised disturbances.⁴⁸ This insurrection assumed no such flagrant and serious proportions in the south in its early stage as it did in the north. Evidently the unconcerted outbreaks in the north came as a surprise to the confederates of the south, for Dhoondaji Waug not only disregarded the accepted strategy but also failed to send the promised expedition to Coimbatore. Though he afforded relief to Bellum, it was doubtful whether he attempted to take his allies into confidence in view of his pre-occupations in the campaign.

Advance on Coimbatore

The destruction of the Fifth Regiment and capture of Coimbatore having been decided, the confederates of the south proceeded accordingly to execute their daring strategem on the appointed day. On the 31st of April 1800 five columns issued forth from the

⁴⁴ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5578 and 5586.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 253, p. 4757.

⁴⁶ Madras Council, 18 June 1800, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 107, p. 228.

⁴⁷ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 20 February 1801, No. 3579 p. 65 and Sevatiah's declaration, Board of Revenue, 28 December 1801, Vol. 305, pp. 15385-9.

⁴⁸ Amildar of Oroor, 18 March 1801, letter to Lushington, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 77.

jungles of Dindigul, ready for the assault on the British stronghold. This marked the beginning of the Rebellion. It does not appear that any rebel expedition came from the north to assist in the venture.

All the insurgent columns were well equipped but they kept their movements secret. They belonged to different descriptions, for among them were common peasants, irregular troops of the chiefs and sepoy, formerly in the army of Tipu Sultan. Kaurka Gour of Aruvakurichi and Futteh Mohammad of Hosur led the first party towards Dharapuram and Ronoun-ullah Khan of Itchaputty led the second towards Kangeyam.⁴⁹ The rest of the parties commanded by Mohammad Hasham, Appaji Gour and Shamiah, respectively, advanced on Coimbatore. Chinnan Gour undertook the overall direction of the operations.⁵⁰ Though the insurgents were armed with pikes and match-locks, they committed no irregularity but disappeared into the ranks of the common people,⁵¹ waiting for the appointed day to come. In the meantime they enlisted the support of more of the villages.⁵² Early in May a body of rebels, 500 to 600 strong, made their appearance in the vicinity of Coimbatore. The inhabitants of the town led by Narsing Bhao, not only gave shelter to the insurgents, as agreed upon, but extended all possible aid as local guides. On the 3rd of June 1800 the different rebel parties took positions at strategic points in the town and lay in wait for the arrival of the party commanded by Mohammad Hasham, to strike at the enemy.⁵³ Nothing has been specified whether Shaik Hussain, as directed by the Dindigul Council, commanded the storming parties.

Though carefully planned and elaborately organised, the plot proved abortive. To the consternation of the patriots the Tahsildar of the town received secret information about the rebel machinations a few hours before the contemplated assault could be launched and passed on the intelligence to the British garrison. Instantly Lieutenant Colonel Macalister alerted all the European officers,

⁴⁹ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5576-83.

B. Hurdis, 8 June 1800, letter to Board of Revenue, Individual Papers, No. 34.

⁵⁰ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5594-99.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 253, pp. 4754-6.

⁵² Ibid., 23 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5767-8.

⁵³ B. Hurdis, 8 June 1800, letter to Board of Revenue, Individual Papers, Nos. 34-35.

assembled the entire garrison and equipped them with fire arms. He ordered the Mohammadan sepoys to proceed with their celebrations but directed the European and Rajput troops, mounted on horse-back, to take positions at the vulnerable points and to guard against any possible rebel attack. Parties sent in search of the suspects arrested Narsing Bhao and six others. Finding their long cherished cause lost, the patriots quietly withdrew to the hills, ten miles away. Reports that reached the English indicated that the rebels kept themselves hiding, waiting for instructions from their leaders and for further opportunity.⁵⁴ The confederates, no doubt, suffered a startling reverse in an unexpected quarter.

After the failure of this design the insurgents who withdrew to the hills made irruptions in other directions.⁵⁵ Armed men taking their positions at Dharapuram, Satyamangalam and Talamalla, threatened the British posts. Concerned at the possibility of the spread of the rebellion, the English detached troops to the centres of disturbances, but the rebels returned to the hills. However in a battle at Talamalla one of their columns was surprised and defeated.⁵⁶ Troops sent in search of the fugitives apprehended and captured several of them from the jungles. Among the captives was Mohammad Hasham,⁵⁷ who carried with him several letters given by the leaders, but before he fell into the hands of the enemy he destroyed all of them. The English promptly placed Hasham in irons and decided to interrogate him in order to obtain information about the rebel conspiracy. However, dedicated patriot as he was, he thwarted the intention of the aliens by committing suicide on the 8th of June 1800, by cutting his throat.⁵⁸

Trial of the Conspirators

Determined to deter the inhabitants from acting as agents and emissaries of the hostile Confederacy and to make a public example of the captured rebels, Governor Edward Clive directed William

⁵⁴ Board of Revenue, 23 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5765-6.

⁵⁵ K. Macalister, 11 June 1800, Report to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 17-19.

⁵⁶ Board of Revenue, 23 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, p. 5752.

⁵⁷ B. Hurdis, 8 June 1800, letter to Board of Revenue, Individual Papers, Nos. 34-35.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5576-83.

Macleod, Collector of Salem, to punish the prisoners with the utmost degree of promptitude. He directed the Collector to bring them to summary trial by military process and to inflict on them the penalty of death or any other severe punishment, that the latter judged adequate.⁵⁹ Accordingly, all the prisoners, forty-two in number, captured before and after the Coimbatore plot, were put to trial by court martial. Simple armed men in the service of the rebels, they appeared to have belonged to the rank and file and that description of people who seemed to have shared no secrets of the rebel councils. Their confessions revealed no startling facts nor even those secret moves, that led to the organisation of the Rebellion. Yet they shed light on the different interests which persuaded some of the inhabitants to seek service with the rebels, the frequent consultations made by the leaders, extensive intrigues, the financial difficulties that they experienced and the assistance extended by the common people to the rebel cause. Shumnus Khan, one of the captured rebels, declared that the conspiracy aimed at occupying Coimbatore was held at Virupakshi and that Gopala Nayak presided over it and served as the guiding genius.⁶⁰

In the course of his trial on the 8th of June 1800 Mohe-ud-din Khan made this confession: 'I came to Dharapuram when Syed Imaum, a friend of mine, came and told me that Mohammad Hasham was raising men in Virupakshi. I went there with him and Mohammad Hasham told me to wait by him. I told him I would if he provided for my expenses, otherwise that I could not, he said he would do so. I waited 8 days he gave me nothing, I then returned to Dharapuram he sent for me again. I went. He sold a mare and gave Peer Saib some money to raise men; on hearing this I asked what I was to receive. He (Mohammad Hasham) said he was going to Coimbatore where he would give me something. While at Periakottai I saw Khan-i-Jah Khan, Appaji Gour of Permaty Talooq, Chinnana Gour of Kangeyam, Fetteh Mohammad and the Amildar of Itchapetty Shaik Hussain who were all consulting together—but on what I know not.

'A Rajput and a Mahratta came there from Narsingabaun (Narsing Bhao) of Coimbatore, stayed two days, conversed with the aforesaid people who when they were going away, sent Syed

⁵⁹ Board of Revenue, 10 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, pp. 6115-6.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5767-8.

Imam and Maun Khan with them to Coimbatore. I was at Dharapuram at this time—when Syed Imam came, having left the three people who came with him in Alagumalai talooq, and asked me to go with him, we all five went to Coimbatore—the two people who came from thence put us into a mahzud and went to their homes—Syed Imam and Mann Khan afterwards went to Narsingabaun's house, where they consulted together and returned. We remained there for three days. The two people who came with me told me that Narsingabaun said if Mohammad Hasham came there he would collect people. When Syed Imam and Mann Khan were returning from Narsingabaun, he gave them a shawl which they sold to Lingoji, a taylor for ten *chakrams*—4 *fanams*.⁶¹ Mann Khan remained in Coimbatore and we went to Periakottai where we told Mohammad Hasham that Narsingabaun said if he came to Coimbatore he would supply men.

'The day before Mohammad Hasham went away Shaik Hussain, Amildar of Itchapetty, went with 4 or 5 people to Coimbatore. Fute Mohammad and Chinna Gounden went to Delli. We left Periakottai 12 days ago with Mohammad Hussain to go to Coimbatore, but were all seized near Palladum. Seid Imam's house is at Dharapuram. He and Mann Khan told me that Runna Mustah Khan, the late Amildar of Coimbatore Cusbah and Narsingabaun had consulted together and sent them all to Mohammad Hasham. I saw three peons of the Satyamangalam *Candachars*⁶² who came to Curriamputty—where Sheik Hussain, Appaji Gour and Kankana Gour were—and told them if they came with some people at that time, they would instantly take the fort (of Satyamangalam). Sheik Hussain came to Periakottai. The two Gours I have not seen since'.⁶³

Mohiuddin, a rebel from Tiruchirapalli, made this declaration to the court martial on 8th of June 1800: 'Hearing that a Subadar was come from Coimbatore to Virupakshi to raise men, I went there and heard he was in Periakottai. I went there and found Mohammad Hasham ready to set out for Coimbatore. I made my salam

⁶¹ *Chakram* was a wheel-shaped coin, exchange rates of which varied; normally 4 *chakrams* for one *fanam* and at some places $2\frac{1}{2}$ *chakrams*. *Fanam* or *panam* was a small gold or silver coin. Sixteen *fanams* made one pagoda.

⁶² *Candachar* peons meant irregular sepoy.

⁶³ Mohiuddin Khan, declaration, 8 June 1800, Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5752-9.

to him. He asked where I was come from. I told him from Aruvakurichi. He desired to know my intention. I informed him it was my wish to get service as a troop horseman. He said he was going there to Coimbatore and told me to go with him. I went with him and was seized near Palladum'.⁶⁴

On the 8th of June 1800 Sheik Mean made a detailed statement to the court martial: 'I went to Coimbatore in my way to Seringapatnam, but hearing the place was taken I returned to Pollachi. The Tahsildar Seshayyan was then raising peons (for the rebels). I got service as one and was kept for four months, when I was dismissed. Being out of service, I waited as a fakir in the masjid, the muccaundar of which gave me victuals. I was afterwards going to Doondiah's camp and in my way there met Mohammad Hasham and his *gulaum* boy Hyder Khan, Sumash Khan Ali Seib, Mann Khan and Sheik Ali at Codekul. We went all together to Doondiah's army at Soonda. Mohammad Hasham went to Dhoondiah and got service for himself, horse and colts. We remained twenty days in the camp when Doondiah ordered Mohammad Hasham to attend Chinnan Gour, who was going to Virupakshi, and obey his orders. Mohammad Hasham told me he was going and desired me to go with him. I told him I was getting service in the army and could not. He then entreated me much and promised me 100 rupees for my marriage. I consented and came with him; as did Sheik Hussain, Amildar of Itchapetty, Futte Mohammad, Chinnan Gour, Hyder Khan, Sheik Ali, Mann Khan, Sumash Khan, Celar Khan, one boy Ali Seib and his brother Muddas Seib and Mohammad Seib. With Chinnan Gour came two Brahmins and those two servants in all 20 people. We came by Kaveripuram Pass where Chinnan Gour went forward with his people, desiring us to follow him to Virupakshi. All us Musselmen went to Periakottai when Mohammad Hasham, Futteh Mohammad and Hussein Seib leaving me, and the others, they went to the Virupakshi Poligar (Gopala Nayak) with whom they conversed, he gave them each a turban and they returned to Periakottai a month afterward. Peer Seib was sent by Mohammad Hasham and the other Musselmen, something for their expence being provided, to Coimbatore to raise men; Futteh Mohammad

⁶⁴ Mohiuddin, declaration, 8 June 1800, Board of Revenue, *Proceedings*, Vol. 255, p. 5759.

went to Dhili (Delli). The poligar after this desired us to go away from there (to prevent suspicion of the enemy). Mohammad Hasham then gave him two colts and sold him (to) one man for two hundred and thirty rupees. Peer Seib not having returned with the people from Coimbatore, Mohammad Hasham, Hyder Khan, Moher-deen Khan, Seid Mohiud-deen and myself set out for Coimbatore on the 1st June but we were all seized near Palladum. All the others went away eight days before towards Coimbatore'.⁶⁵

Hyder Khan, a rebel from Srirangapatnam and formerly a sepoy in the service of Tipu, made the following declaration on the 8th of June, 1800. 'I served in Tipoo's army and remained at Srirangapatnam for 4 months after it was taken. I then went for service to Meer Commerud deen Khan who said if I brought a fire-lock or sword he would take me. I returned, brought a cullock to trade with and went to Nunjenhully, three gow on this side of Srirangapatnam, where I met Mohammad Hasham, who told me as he had four horses, he would give me one and take me with him to Gurrumkondah, where I should get service. We went there, but could not get it. Mohammad Hasham's brother's brother-in-law was serving in Cummerud deen's army, from whom he got 25 rupees and we went to Veziapuram, the amildar of which place gave him 25 rupees, we then went to Doondiah's camp where Chinnan Gour, *Patel*⁶⁶ of Kangeyam, came. Doondiah gave Mohammad Hasham 25 *pagodas* and ordered him to accompany Chinnan Gour who he said was going to Virupakshi. The following persons came with him—Mohammad Hasham, Sheik Hussain, Amildar of Itchaputty, Soolimalai Amildar. Futteh Mohammad who with Chinnan Gour were the four chiefs, Sheik Madar Sheik Bud-din, Gulam Hussain Sheik Ali, Peer Mohammad, Mann Khan, Gulam Ali, Abdul Kader Shamaush Khan, Shelar Khan, Chota Abdul Kader, Mohammad Sheriff, Sheik Meera, Sheik Mearn, Sheik Mohammad Delarver, Puna, Peer Mungappa Ali, Peshayer, Mullapah Gunimurthi, Subbarow, a Brahmin, and myself. We all left Doondiah's camp together and went to Nurgundum, Arthewarny, Gurumkondah, Chintamonypet, Oosoor, by Hooly-

⁶⁵ Sheik Mean, 8 June 1800, declaration, Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5759-5761.

⁶⁶ *Patel* is the common name given to the headman of a village.

droog Pass to Penegra from thence to Dalavoypettah. Chinnan Gour went forward from Penegra ordering us to come on to Curriamputty of (in) Virupakshi, when we all went and to Periakottai, whence Mohammad Hasham and the others sent word to the Poligar of their arrival. The Poligar in reply desired to know for what they were come and ordered them to go away as he and Mr Hurdis (Collector of Dindigul) were not on good terms (for the rebel intrigues alerted the enemy by this time). They then informed him they would remain there till Chinnan Gour's arrival, when they could speak to him and go away. The Poligar was then quiet and they sent him word they had nothing for their expenses. He gave them twenty days batta (provision) at the rate of one seer of rice and 5 cash per man per diem. Chinnan Gour then came to Davatory whence he had the other three chiefs with their Kismisdar went to the Virupakshi Poligar with whom they conversed. He gave to Mohammad Hasham, Sheik Hussain and Futteh Mohammad each a turban—he gave a cloth to Chinnan Gour who requested of him a loan of 3,000 rupees. The Poligar refused it telling him he did not wish him to remain in his country (estate). He therefore went away, but where I know not. Futteh Mohammad and a Brahmin went to look for him. The Poligar was then going to send us allowance when Mohammad Hasham made him a present of one of the colts he had; one mari (horse) and 2 fowls—he sold (to) the Poligar for two hundred and thirty rupees—9 of which he gave to Sheik Hussain, Amildar of Itchapetty and sent him away with Sheik Meera, Sheik Mohammad, Peer Mohammad, Detawer Sheik Imam and 7 or 8 others and a Rajapoot and a Mahratta who had come from Coimbatore to that place to raise men, eight days before we set out. He ordered the others also to go there and they went. Peena Sheik Mean, Mohir Deen Khan, Syed Mohirdeen and myself set out afterwards with Mohammad Hasham for Coimbatore, but were all seized'.⁶⁷

In the interest of their imperialism but in total disregard to popular aspirations for freedom, the English most iniquitously condemned all these patriots to the extreme penalty of death.⁶⁸ Among these victims, forty-two in number, were Appaji Gour and

⁶⁷ Hyder Khan, 8 June 1800, declaration to the court martial, Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5761-6.

⁶⁸ Board of Revenue, 16 June 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 255, pp. 5582-3.

five of the representatives, sent by Dhoondaji Waug to Dindigul.⁶⁹ In an attempt to terrorise the inhabitants, they were executed publicly: eight of them at Dharapuram, seven at Satyamangalam, six at Coimbatore and the rest in different centres of disaffection.⁷⁰ Despite the terror spread by these wanton examples of barbarity, the enemy failed to cow down the people. While the inhabitants of Coimbatore and Salem continued hostilities, as the English themselves had admitted,⁷¹ the rebels of other regions swiftly moved into the arena of insurrection.

Pattern of the Struggle

As in a chain-reaction the Rebellion spread over extensive territories. Despite the trial and tribulation they faced, the patriots made an earnest endeavour to put their co-ordinated strategy into action but with no complete success. Means of communications were seldom and difficulties of quick movements great. While the enemy retained the freedom to strike where it decided, the insurgents with their irregular methods of warfare had to hold their positions, spread over a vast area.

Almost from the beginning the plan of simultaneous insurrection went awry. Before the timing of the outbreaks had been decided the confederates of the north entered the warpath. It had its spontaneous reverberation in all the rebel dominated region but it was not very pronounced in its initial phase. The confederates of the south had moved cautiously as no signal for their rebellion had been given, for the 'horse' did not appear. Consequently, together with simultaneous outbreaks in vast areas, rebellion spread in wave after wave in succession in other regions. The insurgents sought to execute the Coimbatore plot as it had been scheduled but it proved futile. Despite this, the confederates in accordance with their plan to distract the enemy's attention in diverse directions and at times taking advantage of the withdrawal of the British forces, raised disturbances to synchronise with military operations elsewhere and sought to extend their mutual aid in

⁶⁹ Madras Council, October 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 2, p. 561.

⁷⁰ Board of Revenue, 18 September 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 262, pp. 8093-5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2 January 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 270, p. 79.

times of peril. Thus when the enemy moved against the insurgents of Kannadanadu the allies of the latter in the West Coast rose in rebellion. When the British turned against the confederates of Malabar the patriots of Tamilnadu defied the British authority.

Unexpected as these outbreaks were, they took the English by complete surprise. Having overcome the initial shock, the enemy directed its strategy as dictated by the exigencies of the time. Because of the union of rebel interests and the proximity of the provinces of Dindigul, Coimbatore and Malabar, the Company decided to begin a co-ordinated assault against the defiant powers of this region.⁷² While the preparations were in progress, the disturbances raised in Kannadanadu assumed ominous proportions. As signs of trouble threatened from all directions and as the cloud of distraction thickened, the embarrassed British revised their strategy, withdrew their troops from the West Coast and marched them against the Kannada rebels.⁷³ This formidable concentration of the military strength of the Company and its allies, the Peshwa and the Nizam, upset the calculations of the patriots, for it prevented Dhoondaji Waug from marching his cavalry to Coimbatore. Limited military operations continued in the West Coast during these important campaigns. The enemy thwarted all possibility of any serious co-operation between the rebel leagues without at the same time allowing its military power to be dispersed over a wide area. After the end of the hostilities in the north the English moved in strength against Malabar. Though Dindigul was in rebellion, they withdrew their troops from this district and sent them to reinforce the detachments in the west, for the Madras Council admitted: 'We judged it to be more advisable to hazard the consequences of a partial diminution of the force in Dindigul than to cripple the more important exertions of Colonel Stevenson', who commanded the detachments of the Company in Malabar.⁷⁴ As the confederates of Dindigul now threatened to wipe out the British authority, the Company moved its troops from Tirunelveli

⁷² Madras Council, 19 December 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 801.

⁷³ Edward Clive, 17 February 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 32, p. 333.

⁷⁴ Madras Council, 22 December 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 5, pp. 1639-40.

for holding the besieged positions. Immediately after this development the imprisoned rebels made their escape from Palayamkottai and were instantly joined by a large number of followers. The insurrection became so formidable that it spread far and wide and threw the enemy into a quandary.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Edward Clive, 18 March 1801, Secret Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 60-70.

CHAPTER VI

INSURRECTION OF KANNADANADU

IN APRIL 1800 immediately after the British forces took the field against the allied rebels of the Bel country, the patriots of Kannadanadu and southern Maharashtra rose in arms. Leaving the frontier of the Maratha Empire, which sheltered them for long, they began extensive depredations. The enemy had been concentrating its military strength against the confederates of Dindigul, Coimbatore and Malabar after its misconceived adventure in Bellum but this counter-move by the Kannada League threw the British strategy into jeopardy. Dictated by expediency, the Company promptly suspended mobilisation of forces against the rebels of the central region and concentrated on the more formidable insurgents of Kannadanadu. Gaining the support of the Peshwa of Poona, Nizam of Hyderabad and Rajah of Mysore, the enemy assembled a powerful army. Kongunadu (Coimbatore) had been the field of rebel intrigues but with the commencement of hostilities the centre of political gravity shifted to Kannadanadu.

Rebel Depredations

The insurgent forces began a powerful offensive against the English and their allies with the reduction of Jerrah in the British held Soonda and Harpanahalli, garrisoned by the troops of Mysore, and Guddack and Savanur, held by the forces of the Peshwa.¹ After the consolidation of these initial gains, parties of armed men made incursions into the western provinces ruled by the Company and the eastern territories held by the Nizam. The rebels' victory in the capture of Savanur was of great importance, for it occupied a strategic position on the Mysore border. They converted it into their stronghold and rushed through preparations for an expedition across Mysore in support of the confederates of the south.² On the 4th of May 1800 Governor Edward Clive conveyed his anxiety to Colonel Wellesly that the movements of

¹ Madras Council, 26 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 512.

² Secret Sundries for 1800, Vol. 20, pp. 269-270.

Dhoondaji Waug on the northern frontier of Mysore and the sensation which they appeared to have created among the chieftains afford reason to suspect a system of concerted insurrection. . .³ The inhabitants of various descriptions from the territories of the Peshwa, Nizam, Company and of Mysore swelled the rebel ranks. Their progress continued unchallenged: they gained striking victories with the occupation of Rana Bennur, Honagal, Manowly, Bannu and Chinnoor.⁴ With the simultaneous assault on the positions of the English and their allies, the confederates thus allowed themselves to be drawn into a wider conflict.

On the 20th of April the rebel cavalry advanced to Dummel. The *hircarrahs*, sent by the English, reported that on the 25th the rebel parties attempted to take the fort by escalade, as they had no guns to breach the walls. Iipdaur Sheik Hamid commanded the operations. The insurgents carried six ladders, but except one all were found too short for gaining the summit. Sheik Hamid and his veterans, who included the rebels from Tamilnadu, scaled the walls and gained a footing on the works above but ere they could be joined by more, the ladder by mischance broke down. The garrison, alerted by the sentry, rallied immediately, cut the assailants to pieces, and threw hand grenades and other combustibles upon the armed crowds hiding in the ditch below. The enemy sallied forth and in a sharp encounter that followed the rebels lost 300 killed. Despite this debacle, the attacking party regrouped and instituted a blockade.⁵ As no relief expedition reached to its rescue, Dammal surrendered on the 28th. The next day Dhoondaji Waug attended by 6,000 horse and Yenkapah, whom he appointed *killedar*, made public entry into the town.⁶

The Peshwa's detachment, commanded by Appa Sahib, sought to expel the insurgents from their strongholds, but without success. A rebel column defeated it capturing 300 of its horse.⁷ Early in May the Marathas attacked Kolhapur, as the ruler of this territory allied himself with Dhoondaji Waug, but were forced to withdraw

³ Edward Clive, 5 May 1800, letter to Wellesley, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 483.

⁴ Madras Council, 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 465 and 473.

⁵ Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, pp. 580-1.

⁶ Ibid., 7 June 1800, Vol. 68, p. 602.

⁷ Madras Council, 8 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 490-1.

on the arrival of a relief expedition sent by the Scindia.⁸ Soon after the withdrawal of the Maratha force, a detachment from the army of the Scindia, commanded by his nephew, joined the rebels at Kolhapur.⁹

The arrival of parties of insurgents from the camp of Dhondaji Waug in the west gave the signal to the spread of the rebellion to Soonda, Kanara and the western region of Mysore. Reinforced by these armed men, the patriots of Kanara, led by Timma Nayak, surprised and occupied the large fort of Jamalabad towards the end of April 1800.¹⁰ Situated about thirty-four miles away from Mangalore and built of stone and mud, it was oblong-shaped, five miles in circumference with towers and a dry ditch twenty feet wide all around. The steps, 363 in number, mostly cut out of solid rock close to the edge of a dreadful precipice, led the way to the upper fort.¹¹ The success in gaining possession of this stronghold imparted a fresh impetus to the spread of the rebellion in this province. The advancing parties followed up this victory with a series of assaults on the British posts. They reduced Bannevassy and Kondah in Kanara and took possession of the stores including a large quantity of pepper.¹² In the southern region of Kanara armed columns, led by Mahtab Khan and Subba Rao, established themselves in the woods of Subramonia Pass, from where they made inroads into the western territory, extending up to Jamalabad.¹³ In association with these chieftains Vittel Hegeda raised disturbances in the district of Vittel and expelled the English from Kumlah, a post situated between Bekeel and Mangalore. Krishnappa Nayak not only retained possession of the Bel country but extended his aid to other chiefs engaged in the struggle.¹⁴ In June Vittel Hegeda and Krishnappa Nayak, deciding upon a determined offensive, united their armed groups into a powerful force. Subba Rao, taking the command of this body and gaining the support of the Moplas in the name of Futteh Hyder, son of Tipu Sultan, attacked the cutcheries of the Company, occupied

⁸ Ibid., 17 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 507-8.

⁹ Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, p. 583.

¹⁰ Madras Council, 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 473.

¹¹ Ibid., 7 December 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 276, pp. 3247-8.

¹² Board of Revenue, 7 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, pp. 6041-4.

¹³ Madras Council, 24 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 274-7.

¹⁴ Ibid., August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 388.

Oopenagurry, plundered Buntawal, a commercial centre in Kanara, and advanced to Puttoor.¹⁵ The insurgents of Ankolah took possession of Bilghee, while those of Coorg ravaged the districts of Nileswaram and Barkoor.¹⁶

The liberation of large areas from the rule of the English and their allies warranted the establishment of a new administration. The confederates proceeded to formulate their own system of government in the context of the struggle. They made settlement of revenue in their districts and appointed *amildars* for the administration.¹⁷ The villages were required to contribute what they could, whether it was in grain, wood or straw to further the cause of rebellion. The rebel administration paid prices at the market rate for the provisions, it procured. The public servants were prohibited from committing any irregularity upon the population. *Hircarrahs* were pressed into service for the collection of intelligence about the movements of the hostile forces.¹⁸ Dhoondaji Waug appointed Hira Nayak as the administrator of Savanur. After the establishment of order, he decided to give this territory to Khyn Miah, a brother-in-law of Tipu.¹⁹ A descendant of the ancient royal family of Soonda was directed to administer that district.²⁰ Through moderation and liberality the insurgents sought to gain popular support to their administration.

The rapid spread of the rebellion over extensive regions and the quick victories gained by the confederates excited a fermentation throughout the western region of the Peninsula. The alliance system of the rebels and the union of Dhoondaji Waug with the other leaders in open resistance seriously threatened the stability of British sway. As provinces had been invaded and occupied, Governor General Mornington instructed Governor Robert Clive on the 11th of May 1800: 'The considerable force, which Dhoondaji Waug is stated to have collected, joined to his well known character, renders it indispensably necessary, that the most vigorous and

¹⁵ Board of Revenue, 3 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, pp. 5917-18.

¹⁶ Ibid., 28 August 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 261, pp. 7425-6.

¹⁷ Madras Council, 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 465 and 473.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27 June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 61-62.

¹⁹ Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, pp. 582-3.

²⁰ Board of Revenue, 28 August 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 261, pp. 7425-6.

decisive measures should be adopted for the timely and effectual removal of the danger with which the Territories of the Company and of our allies are at present menaced'.²¹

British Preparations

On the 15th May 1800 the Madras administration directed Colonel Arthur Wellesley²² to assemble the forces and to take the field against the confederates with promptitude.²³ An adequate knowledge of the country that he acquired as Commander of the Company's forces in Mysore, coupled with his known gallantry, made him eminently qualified to undertake this onerous task. To enable the complete co-ordination of operations against the defiant Confederacy, he was invested with full control over all the detachments in Malabar, Kanara and Mysore.²⁴ In June 1800 he devoted himself to the equipment of an army at Chitaldroog on the north-western frontier of Mysore.²⁵ Forces from Bombay and Goa,²⁶ troops brought from Ceylon, the Twelfth Regiment and the Twenty-fifth Dragoons rushed from England and the Second Battalion of the Fifth Regiment of native infantry were ordered to reinforce the grand army.²⁷ Wellesley considered it essential to press into the field the Subsidiary Force in Hyderabad and the Nizam's detachments.²⁸ He sent an urgent message to MacLean, Commander of the Subsidiary Force, to cross River Krishna and move towards the Maratha frontier for checking the spread of the rebellion to the territory of the Nizam.²⁹ Despite a formidable array that was mobilised, the English felt it inadequate to deal

²¹ Mornington, 11 May 1800, letter to Edward Clive, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 513.

²² Colonel Arthur Wellesley, brother of Governor General Mornington, was the Commander of Company's forces in Mysore. In 1815 he led the British forces to victory in the battle of Waterloo with Napoleon Bonaparte.

²³ Edward Clive, 5 May 1800, letter to Wellesley, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 483.

²⁴ Madras Council, 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 281, p. 2992.

²⁵ Secret Sundries for 1800, Vol. 20, p. 270.

²⁶ Madras Council, 14 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 219.

²⁷ Ibid., 3 August 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 272, p. 609 and 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 473, 492 and 512.

²⁸ Ibid., 14 June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 219-20.

²⁹ Ibid., June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

with the confederates. The rebels not only assembled large columns, but continued to grow stronger with more inhabitants rallying to their ranks. The possibility of the Maratha powers too joining the camp of the confederates in waging a joint war of liberation against the common foe loomed large. Added to these, the rebels had entrenched themselves in their secure strongholds within the Maratha Empire, the liquidation of which required the aid of the Peshwa.³⁰ Pressed by these compelling circumstances, the Company sought the assistance of its Indian allies. Indifferent to the national cause, the rulers appeared ready to lend their full support to the enemy. Krishna Rajah Wodayar of Mysore not only placed his troops at the disposal of the Company but supplied provisions. The attitude of the Nizam too appeared very helpful, for on the 19th of June 1800 J. Webbe, Secretary to the Madras Government, wrote to Colonel Wellesley: 'I am directed to acquaint you that in consequence of an urgent application to the Resident at Hyderabad on the subject of placing the troops destined to co-operate with you under your immediate orders for the more effectual prosecution of the service against Dhoondiah and the restoration of tranquillity on the frontier His Highness the Nizam evinced the most ready disposition to accede to a proposal so well calculated to promote the interests of both States'.³¹ Accordingly, the Hyderabad detachment commanded by Saad-ul-lah Khan was moved to Raichur Doab in June 1800 to join the operations.³² At the request of his ally, the Nizam directed the Rajahs of Sholapur and Gudwaul under threat of severe chastisement to withdraw their support to the rebels and to assist the English for the suppression of the rising, but these chieftains ignored the warning.³³ Eager to gain the support of the Marathas, Wellesley wrote to Balakrishna Pundt, the Commander of their forces: 'Doondiah has been intriguing and endeavouring to foment disturbances in the Territories of the Honourable Company and their allies, he has been collecting a large body of troops for the purpose of invading them, he has collected them in the Province of Savanur, and he has already

³⁰ Ibid., 27 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 516-20.

³¹ J. Webbe, 19 June 1800, letter to Wellesley, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, p. 3638.

³² Madras Council, 14 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 215.

³³ Ibid., 19 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 266-7.

detached a party into one of the provinces (Soonda) belonging to the Honourable Company'.³⁴ The Peshwa instead of safeguarding the integrity of his empire, not only permitted the English to march into his territory in pursuit of the insurgents but also placed his forces at their service.³⁵ On the 17th of June a detachment led by Balakrishna Pundt joined Wellesley at Hurrihur.³⁶

The enemy sent numerous *hircarrahs* to probe into the rebel camps and to gather intelligence. These spies moved in disguise to the centres of disaffection in Raichur, Bannoo, Chinnoor, Kanna-ghirry, Coondrymooty and Kalloor. In one of their accounts they furnished to Wellesley a vivid picture of the rebel camp, as they saw it at Hattikotta near Dummel on the 20th of May 1800.³⁷ It indicated that the insurgents ran to a large multitude, commanded extensive support, made comprehensive arrangement for the supply of provisions and had taken adequate precautions against surprise attacks. However what drastically restricted their striking potential was the inadequate supply of equipment, particularly of the category of fire arms. As they found themselves at a glaring disadvantage in pitched battles against the aliens, equipped with superior armament, they relied upon cavalry as the principal source of their strength. The camp consisted of 50,000 good horse, 40,000 inferior horse, 14,000 infantry with fire arms, 10,000 with swords, pikes and clubs, 30,000 Benjaries, employed for the transport of provisions, four small guns and five elephants. It covered an extent of four *coss*³⁸ with twenty-five flags raised over the tents. The bazaars were numerous of which four were large: the first was named after Dhoondaji Waug, the second after his wife, the third after the Emperor of Delhi and the fourth after Hyder Ali. Thirty Portuguese were said to be in the service of the rebels but the spies could meet only two. An *amir*, who commanded 10,000 horse, mounted the guard daily over the tents and kept two horses constantly ready for Dhoondaji Waug. The rebels maintained secret correspondence with their allies in Mysore

³⁴ Wellesley, 10 June 1800, letter to Balakrishna Pundt, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 39.

³⁵ Madras Council, 18 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 651.

³⁶ Ibid., June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 39.

³⁷ Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, p. 580.

³⁸ A *coss* is equivalent to three miles.

and other countries. Rangaputti Ranga Rau,³⁹ the Rajah of Rayadroog, Hira Nayak,⁴⁰ a relation of the Rajah of Sholapur and several leaders of consequence stayed in the camp.⁴¹

The *hircarrahs* sent another report to Wellesly as they saw the camp by the end of June 1800. It gave more details to the English. They reported: all the chieftains gave the greatest attention to Dhoondaji Waug. Venkat Rao, Ghoopurat and Akibut Khyr Khan were among his principal associates. It was said in the camp that the rebels received considerable support from Daulat Rao Scindia and the Rani of Kolhapur. Scindia presented a state palanquin to Dhoondaji Waug in recognition of his ability in organising resistance to the English. The rebel chief had collected 50,000 men of whom 30,000 were horsemen, though all including the irregulars made his army 70,000 to 80,000 strong. The infantry was by no means well supplied with fire arms. Dhoondaji Waug would admit anyone, who would bring with him a small horse. 'He is joined almost daily by parties of horsemen, when first they arrive, he keeps them without his camp and send *mootusuddies*⁴² to make reports to him, which when he had investigated, he admits them, and himself points out the place for their encampment. He is particularly cautious and watchful for he admits only those to his *darbar* whom he sends for, and regularly plants piquets. His people are all strictly forbidden to committing depredations on the inhabitants of the country, whom he obliges to sell their goods at a fair rate'. The troops were supported by what they purchased by levies, made on the villages on the basis of population. While the smaller villages were required to contribute straw and wood, the larger village other provisions.⁴³

Guided by the reports of the spies, Wellesley formulated a plan for offensive operations. As it was essential for a successful campaign to prevent the rebels of the west and of the east from extending their reciprocal aid the enemy decided on engaging the two rebel blocs of Kannadanadu simultaneously. While the forces stationed

³⁹ Ranga Rauz, the son of the Rajah of Anagundi, was a descendant of the Emperor of Vijayanagar.

⁴⁰ Hira Nayak was the chief of Kannaghiry.

⁴¹ Military Miscellany, 4 June 1800, Vol. 67, pp. 582-3.

⁴² *Mootusuddies* were investigators.

⁴³ Translation of a report by two *hircarrahs*, 27 June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 61-63.

in the west were to attack and disperse the rebels of Kanara and Soonda, the main army was to take the field against the insurgents led by Dhoondaji Waug. The detachments of the Nizam and the Subsidiary Force under MacLean, advanced towards the Maratha frontier across the Krishna in a bid to check the rebel infiltration to the east. After crossing River Tunga-Bhadra to enter the Maratha Empire, the principal army decided to commence the campaign from the south with the aid of the Nizam's detachments.⁴⁴ Eager to contain the rebellion, Wellesley decided to forestall the possibility of a rebel expedition from Savanur to the help of the confederates of the south, for he wrote to Madras: 'after entering the Mahratta country my first object will be to secure Savanur'.⁴⁵

Raman Nair's Treachery and Western Campaign

The enemy began extensive operations against the insurgents of Kannadanadu with movement of troops to Kanara. Advancing through a woody country the detachment under Lieutenant Colonel Cumine encamped at Jamalabad on the 22nd of April 1800. It posted a piquet and cut off the supplies to the rebel garrison.⁴⁶ On the 27th the troops made a gallant attempt to storm the fort, but were repulsed. The enemy launched two more attacks but the insurgents successfully defended their positions. The beginning of the rains rendered the task of the assailants more irksome.⁴⁷ As force failed, they resorted to treachery. In October they employed Raman Nair, an influential chieftain, against the patriots. Anxious to seize Timma Nayak, who commanded the defiant garrison, this traitor formed an intimacy with him and proposed an hunting excursion. While they were out hunting, Raman Nair gave a signal to a body of Nairs whom he stationed in the jungle. Timma Nayak was seized, tied with ropes and handed over to the enemy at Bekul. The rebel chief was executed and his party dispersed. In return for his treachery Raman Nair received a reward of 590 rupees and a public appro-

⁴⁴ Madras Council, June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁵ Wellesley, 10 June 1800, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶ Madras Council, June 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 477-8.

bation from the aliens. The enemy stormed the fort and regained possession of Jamalabad.⁴⁸

Thomas Munro dealt with the rebels who had established themselves in other parts of Kanara. A body of troops despatched under Kumar Hegeda gained an initial victory but he was shot through his arm, which prevented him from dispersing the insurgents.⁴⁹ The armed groups gathering strength, now took their stand in a village, situated at the foot of the hills on the border of Coorg. The troops of the Company led by one Kurup, surprised the rebel party on the 16th. Subba Rao was defeated and his column dispersed with a loss of fifty men killed or wounded. The fugitives fled to the hills leaving their positions at Puttoor and Buntwall in the possession of the Company.⁵⁰ In July the insurgents, guided by Mahtab Khan and Subba Rao, made depredations in the district of Wustara. Two parties of the Company's troops, one led by Timmaji Pandit and the other by Rahit Khan, charged the column of Subba Rao from the front and the rear on the 15th near Hoospell in the Ghats of Wustara. The rebels made a valiant resistance, but were defeated with heavy loss: 115 including their chief Subba Rao were killed and fifteen were taken as prisoners and hanged to death. The rest of the armed groups fled to the hills.⁵¹

Early in July Thomas Munro sent a force from Manjeswar with instructions to surprise the insurgents led by Narasiah, commonly called Vittel Hegeda. Venkapah whom he employed to seize Hegeda was however taken prisoner and killed. The subsequent encounters changed the course of the struggle against the rebels. On the 9th of July the British force invaded Vittel, engaged Hegeda on the bank of a nulla and killed many of his followers. In a second battle fought on the 18th Hegeda and a few of his people were captured. Influenced by imperialistic sentiments and determined to remove the sources of intrigue against the British authority and to terrorise the inhabitants into submission, Munro suggested the expediency of making a salutary example of the patriots. Edward Clive, the Governor, accepted this suggestion without any hesitation. A court martial promptly tried the rebels and ordered

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11 November 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 275, pp. 2538-40.

⁴⁹ Board of Revenue, 3 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, pp. 5917-8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7 July 1800, Proceedings, Vol. 256, p. 6042.

⁵¹ Madras Council, 24 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 278-279.

execution in the most public and exemplary manner. Lieutenant Colonel Mignan carried out the executions of Vittel Hegeda and his four associates, Buddera, Mohabud-din, Hebbera and Arriah on the Yedgali Hill, the most conspicuous situation in the neighbourhood of Mangalore, on the 25th of August 1800.⁵²

Lieutenant Colonel Montresor led a detachment of troops sent from Bombay and Mysore against the defiant people of Bellum. In the last week of May, 1800 he destroyed the rebel positions in Woochinga and indiscriminately burned the villages. After establishing a post at Munserabad, the invaders attacked and dislodged the armed parties from Arisikarai, but with considerable loss.⁵³ Yet this proved a forlorn adventure. Krishnappa Nayak with an enterprising audacity, that was inherent in his character, counter-attacked his adversaries and expelled them from the hills of Arisikarai. The patriots reconstructed the barriers in anticipation of a grim struggle. As the odds seemed real, Wellesley cautioned Montresor not to risk another humiliation and ordered the retreat of the forces.⁵⁴ Because of the rapid spread of the rebellion in the northern region of Kannadanadu the Company found it impossible to undertake another expedition immediately. The Madras Council reported to the Court of Directors that the attention of Colonel Wellesley having, in consequence of the complexion which the commotions excited by the rebel Dhoondaji Waug began at this period to assume, been directed against that insurgent, it was found necessary to suspend the prosecution of the war against the rebels of the Bel country, bordering on Kanara.⁵⁵

Wellesley's Expedition

In June the principal army of the enemy, commanded by Colonel Wellesley, went into operation against the main body of the rebels led by Dhoondaji Waug. The British forces crossed River Tunga Bhadra, entered the Maratha Empire and on the 26th reached Rana Bennur, guarded by 500 of the insurgents. The garrison fired upon the advanced piquets of Wellesley but

⁵² Madras Council, 11 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 388-390.

⁵³ Ibid., 6 May 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 487.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3 June 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, p. 3259.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 29 May 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 32, p. 333.

the enemy reacted with firmness. The detachment of Lieutenant Colonel Stevenson took position to cut off the possibility of retreat, while another commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Monepenny attacked the post. For want of fire arms the garrison could offer no serious resistance. The assailants escalated the walls on the 27th, engaged the rebels in a bloody encounter and killed most of them.⁵⁶ Dhoondaji in the meantime had taken his position at Savanur.

After this victory the forces of the Company and its allies proceeded to settle the country, extending southward to Bednore. Stevenson stormed several posts and drove the rebel parties to the west.⁵⁷ He cleared the country on the southern bank of River Wardha of the armed groups and re-established communications with Hurrihur, where the Subsidiary Force had encamped. While an expedition by the Subsidiary Force moved towards the frontier of Mysore, Wellesley advanced to Haveri. On the southern bank of the Wardha he established a post for the convenience of storing supplies sent from Mysore and for forwarding them to the advancing troops.⁵⁸ The armies of Hyderabad and the Maratha Empire too blocked off the rebel centres. The detachment, led by MacLean, after crossing River Krishna on the 25th of June, took position for co-operation with the detachments of Wellesley.⁵⁹ A Maratha force commanded by Gokla Punt appeared for operations from the north. Strengthened by these arrivals, the enemy threatened Savanur.

As the continued possession of Savanur was of importance for maintaining communications with Mysore and for marching the cavalry to Coimbatore, the insurgents made a determined effort to thwart the hostile design. Dhoondaji Waug paid a hasty visit, rushed in more troops and strengthened its defences. Armed parties, despatched by the confederates, reinforced the garrisons of Savanur and the forts situated on either side of River Wardha.⁶⁰ The Rajah of Sholapur sent 1,000 horse, 1,000 infantry, two elephants and two guns on an emergency basis and subsequently

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 106-107.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 227-8.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, pp. 639-640.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 227.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 228.

400 horse and 400 infantry as reserve in support of the rebel effort.⁶¹ As the possibility of being assailed from different directions seemed certain, Dhoondaji Waug swiftly moved in strength against the Marathas and isolated them from the other hostile powers. Eager to save the ally, Wellesley warned Gokla Punt, who commanded the Maratha detachment, not to move beyond the north bank of River Malaprabha until the British expedition reached Savanur. Curiously, however, what the Marathas wanted was to open a correspondence with the rebel camp for effecting an amicable settlement. They crossed the river and sent Lingo Punt for negotiation with the insurgents. After visiting the tent of Dhoondaji Waug, Lingo Punt went to the camp of Wellesley. The rebels on hearing that the emissary of Gokla Punt proceeded to the camp of the enemy that was pitched at the village of Londa near Nargond, suspected the real intention of the Marathas. Immediately Dhoondaji Waug struck his camp and marched against the Maratha force that occupied a situation between Londa and Kittoor near a large nulla. Nizam Ali Khan of Kurnool, taking the command of a rebel column, attacked the Maratha camp on the 30th of June. In the furious battle that followed, he wounded Gokla Punt but was killed by the latter. However as the fighting continued, confusion overtook the enemy; Gokla Punt, who fell from his horse, was cut off together with his eldest son.⁶² The vanquished Marathas fled in panic; a section of them towards Hullial in Soonda and the rest to Dharwar. The insurgents gained possession of four guns, left behind by the fleeing fugitives. Dhoondaji Waug, taking advantage of this spectacular victory, marshalled more forces and reasserted his influence. The rebel ascendancy retarded the progress of the army of the Company, protracting the conflict. The disgruntled Wellesley sent messages to the fugitives instructing them to keep united and to join his detachment at the first opportunity.⁶³

The rebel victory sent a thrill of consternation in hostile circles. Eager to retrieve their tarnished prestige, the enemy decided to assault the ill-defended positions. On the 7th of July the forces resumed the offensive. Wellesley's detachment set up its camp

⁶¹ Ibid., 19 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 265.

⁶² Ibid., 28 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 663.

⁶³ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, pp. 641-2.

on the right bank of the Wardha for a thrust on Savanur.⁶⁴ On the 9th the entire Subsidiary Force of Hyderabad, led by Lieutenant Colonel Bowser, crossed the Krishna and set up its camp. The Nizam's detachment, which had encamped on the right bank of the Tunga Bhadra, decided on a campaign in co-operation with the detachment of MacLean.⁶⁵ On the 10th the combined forces moving to Raichur, commenced operations.⁶⁶ Threatened by a formidable concentration of the enemy, the patriots abandoned their positions on the southern bank of the Wardha and withdrew to Dharwar.⁶⁷

Between the 11th and the 15th of July more armed groups joined the rebels. Reinforced considerably, Dhoondaji Waug sought to check the advance of the allied army. He moved to Honagal while a body of his followers began the siege of Sirhutti. On the 13th Dhoondaji Waug marched from Honagal and encamped within six miles of the camp of Wellesley with the intention of attacking the enemy and thereby averting the threat to Savanur. He made a probing operation but was convinced of the overwhelming superiority of the allies. To avoid a certain discomfiture, the confederates considered it prudent to evacuate their stronghold. The British army marching from the bank of the Wardha took possession of Savanur without resistance and made it a base of its campaigns. This shattered all possibility of confederate co-operation in the south. Wellesley, after leaving all baggage in this fort, marched against the rebel camp that was found pitched near Honagal, but when he reached there it already moved to Karwah, eighteen miles away. The insurgents had left a body of 600 men in their post at Honagal, but it was stormed. On the 14th the Colonel issued a proclamation inviting the people to capture the person of Dhoondaji Waug and hand him over to the Company in return for a reward of 30,000 rupees. Though this liberal offer appeared to have had no response, it excited the suspicion of the rebel chief, adding to the confusion in his camp. As the advancing forces hemmed in the insurgents they lifted the siege of Sirhutti. On the 15th they moved to the jungles of Dummel and from there to Unyghirry, eluding the pursuit of the enemy. Failing to draw

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 643.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 28 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 656-7.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 22 July, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 654.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 28 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 657.

the rebels to a battle, Wellesley returned to Savanur. On the 22nd he moved to Lakshmaseer and encamped in a large and populous village, where he seized the grain and cattle from the inhabitants to make up the shortage of supplies to his troops.⁶⁸ He invited the remnant of the Maratha army of Gokla Punt to come out of the jungles of Huthial in Soonda, taking advantage of rebel evacuation from the region, and to join the British camp at Savanur, but the fugitives hesitated and then refused response.⁶⁹ However, on the 26th July a section of these troops took its way to Savanur and joined the English.⁷⁰ The heavy loss of cattle due to bad weather and the shortage of provisions rendered the task of the enemy extremely arduous. At this critical time the Marathas came to its rescue as they did in 1792 for its siege of Srirangapatnam during the Third Mysore War. The Peshwa rushed in provisions to the hard-hit British camp and two Maratha detachments, one led by Appa Sahib and the other by Chintamoni Row, joined the army of Wellesley. The timely Maratha aid enabled the enemy to take the field again against the patriots. Wellesley acknowledged this meritorious service in no unmistakable terms, for he wrote to Madras: 'It is but justice to the Marathas to mention, that I have received from them all the greatest assistance and most cordially given to relieve our distress'.⁷¹

From a situation so adverse and critical as it developed, the patriots made a supreme effort to extricate themselves. They moved to new territories in a bid to make up their diminished influence. Dhoondaji Waug occupied Illore, Balur and Bannoor, held by the Maratha forces. His armed columns sought to cross the Malaprabha but the river was rolling in full flood and they possessed no boats. When the flood subsided, they crossed the river at the Jalihaul ford. On the 23rd of July the rebels set up their camp within six miles of Badami, once the capital city of the Chalukyas. So striking was the popular sympathy for the struggle that more armed columns, 19,000 to 21,000 horse and 2,000 infantry, but all ill-equipped, swelled the ranks of the insurgents. A rabble of 1,51,000 men armed with swords and pikes had

⁶⁸ Ibid., 25 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 336.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 25 July 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 336-9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 13 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 407.

⁷¹ Colonel Wellesley, 24 July 1800, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 347-350.

assembled in the nearby jungles. The Banjaries kept this huge camp well supplied with grain but distress for money and want of fire-arms exercised a crippling impact upon the power of resistance. Dhoondaji Waug sent 7,000 armed men to the different posts with direction to hold on. Jettingah, who at one time conspired with Wellesley for the capture of Dhoondaji Waug,⁷² sought to rejoin the service of the rebels with 4,000 horse. The rebel chief immediately ordered him to hang on the rear of Colonel Wellesley's army and directed him on no account to enter his camp again, remarking that he did not intend to trust a person who had changed masters so often.⁷³ Subsequently, he instructed him to check the advance of Bowser, but on the 25th recalled him for the defence of his own beleaguered lines.⁷⁴

Battles of Dummel and Manowly

Wellesley directed the Maratha troops to occupy the strategic points in order to cut off the escape of the rebels across the Malaprabha. After this arrangement was carried into effect, the British forces moved on Dummel, that was converted into a stronghold by Dhoondaji Waug. A well-built and strong fort with walls thirty feet high and a deep but dry ditch all around, it was improved considerably and was garrisoned by 1,000 men. On the 26th Wellesley served an ultimatum directing the insurgents to surrender unconditionally, but the latter rejected it. Losing no time, the cavalry of Stevenson and the forces of the Peshwa took positions around the citadel, cutting off rebel communications. Wellesley now ordered his troops to commence the assault. Major Desse at the command of the piquets, supported by two companies of the Second Bombay Regiment, attacked the main gate of the fort while Lieutenant Colonel Capper and Captain McPherson with the grenadiers and light infantry attacked on two other sides. A bold venture to break through the gateway was repulsed by the patriots. As no other alternative presented itself, the assailants scaled the walls, crippled rebel resistance by their superior force and occupied the fort. In a sharp engagement inside the ramparts the garrison was cut to pieces, while a few escaped.⁷⁵

⁷² Madras Council, 18 July 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 648.

⁷³ Ibid., 13 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 404-5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 13 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 407.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 358-9.

After this serious reverse, the rebels, led by Dhoondaji Waug, moved to Soudetty. They endeavoured to cross the Malaprabha at Manowly. On gaining this information Wellesley and Bowser formulated a plan of mutual co-operation for attacking the retreating camp. Bowser's detachment on the 29th of July encamped at Dummel ready for an offensive from that quarter, while Wellesley's on the 29th reached Allegawady, situated about fifteen miles from Soudetty and twenty-six miles from Manowly. The two detachments decided to effect a junction on the 31st of July at Nargonda. On receiving information about this hostile formation from their *hircarrahs*, the rebels broke up from Soudetty: one column proceeded to Doodwar, the second eastward towards Manowly. Wellesley now moved to Ongorgore, situated east of Padesgur Hill, as it appeared to be a central situation from where he could obtain full information about the movements of the insurgents. Now a report indicated that the camp of Dhoondaji Waug had reached Manowly.

On the 31st of July the British detachment by forced marches reached Manowly and found the camp still standing. The insurgents had occupied a strong position with the rear side of the camp to the Malaprabha covered by the Fort of Manowly, and a deep nulla along its front and the left. The enemy mounted a fierce attack on the 31st evening. The surprise was so complete that the defenders were driven into panic. Yet the undaunted Dhoondaji Waug reorganised the defences and threw his cavalry in a gallant charge against the assailants. The valiant rebels taking the guns across the river opened a teasing fire from that quarter. Simultaneously, the batteries of the fort started a heavy bombardment, inflicting heavy losses upon the attacking forces. Finding the situation drifting against it, the enemy withdrew and regrouped. Now it launched a furious attack on the camp at three points. The patriots fought gallantly and in two fierce contests beat back the forces of Lieutenant Colonel Torin and Colonel Stevenson that pressed forward from different directions; it appeared that Wellesley had lost the battle. However Colonel Peter, who commanded a third regiment, gained access into the embattled camp and wrought havoc. This turned the tide against the rebels. Most of the defenders died in this grim contest. Many of them drowned in the river or were shot dead as they attempted to cross the river.

However an armed party which waited outside the camp escorted Dhoondaji Waug to safety. The troops led by Major Blacquiere made a dash across the river, seeking to cut off the fugitives, but were beaten back. The enemy, however, took possession of the baggage together with numerous camels, horses, bullocks and elephants.⁷⁶ The attempt of Wellesley to dislodge the rebels from the fort of Manowly failed, though the latter evacuated Guddack.⁷⁷

In spite of these victories, the anxiety of the enemy to find a quick end to the hostilities could not be realised. From the east they subsequently returned, taking their course towards Kittoor. Overstraining their resources, the confederates now poured in fresh recruits into the field. More columns advancing from Sholapur and Kolhapur reinforced the hard-pressed rebels. Now the indefatigable Dhoondaji Waug reorganised his lines. The rebels strengthened the defences of the fort of Manowly and assembled under the protection of its batteries.⁷⁸ Gathering in strength in the valley of Purusghur, a body of insurgents occupied the fort of Hoolly, attacked the British Dragoons and plundered their baggage.⁷⁹ Greatly concerned at these developments, Wellesley wrote to the Madras Government that the disaffection against the English was so widespread and intense that, even if they suppressed Dhoondaji Waug, some other leader, equally daring, would emerge and continue the struggle. In this embarrassed situation the Company sought to isolate the Rajah of Kolhapur from the camp of the Confederates. To attain this objective it used threat as well as conciliation. Wellesley warned him of serious consequences if the Rajah continued his support to the insurgents, but the latter ignored it contemptuously.⁸⁰ Thereupon, he opened a conversation, aimed at reconciliation. This too proved futile. As a next step he suggested to the Madras administration to utilise its influence with the Peshwa for dissuading the prince, from his association with Dhoondaji Waug.⁸¹ When this endeavour yielded no result, Lieutenant Colonel Palmer represented on behalf of the Company

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 379-382.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 5 August 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 667.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 40.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 7 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 459.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 13 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 403.

Ibid., August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 385.

⁸¹ Ibid., 18 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 427-8.

to the Scindia that the latter would subject himself to the suspicion of conspiring at if not actually encouraging the Rajah of Kolhapur in the hostility towards the English unless he used his entire influence to obtain the withdrawal of the Rajah from the alliance with the rebels. All these subtle tactics failed. On the other hand, there remained a strong possibility of the Scindia himself entering the field of battle on the side of the patriots. He not only supported the rebels but entertained plans in concert with the Rajah of Kolhapur to attack the forces of Wellesley. But such was the distracted state of his military and government and the disorder in the Maratha Empire that he on second thoughts decided to avoid drawing upon himself the British resentment.⁸²

Dhoondaji Waug did not seek to remain for long under the walls of Manowly. Unperturbed by his early reverses, he led a body of select men to Kittoor and marching through the jungles, reached the source of the Malaprabha, from where he turned his course towards Sholapur. Early in August the combined forces of the Company and its allies, led by Stevenson and Bowser, marched along the bank of the river for keeping track of the moving party with hopes of finding an opportunity for attack. Reinforced by the detachment of the Nizam, the army encamped at Kopul on the 9th of August.⁸³ With an expectation that Dhoondaji Waug would take his route to Bhangal Kota in the east in his endeavour to cross the Ghatprabha and the Krishna for making a junction with the armed groups of Sholapur and the confederated poligars in the territories of the Nizam and the Peshwa, the enemy by forced marches kept itself in close pursuit of the rebels. Though the patriots were moving constantly on foot for days together, they faced the situation with coolness and courage.⁸⁴ On the 10th they encamped on the banks of the Ghatprabha at Kannapoor, about twenty miles from the camp of Bowser. For want of boats, rapidity of the flow and rocky bed of the river, the insurgents waited till the level of water subsided. Yet the enemy, considering it risky, provoked no conflict.⁸⁵ From his camp at Kurnool, Wellesley requested the commander of

⁸² Palmer, 4 August 1800, letter to Wellesley, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 698.

⁸³ Madras Council, 25 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 438.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 18 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 426-7.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 25 August 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 438.

Scindia's army, which encamped on the right bank of the Krishna, to intercept the rebel column, if it crossed the Ghatprabha. But as the Scindia himself had associated with the insurgents, the commanding officer ignored the entreaties.⁸⁶

In the meantime two British detachments went into operation against the insurgents who had assembled at Hoolly and Jalloor. Incensed at the daring plunder of the baggage by the rebels of Hoolly from the Dragoons, Lieutenant Colonel Capper took the field against them. After a series of skirmishes, the British force attacked and carried the fort of Hoolly by escalade on the 22nd of August. The rebels now moved to Syrhingy, situated eight miles to the eastward of Hoolly. This fort was not only strong but was well defended by the reinforcements rushed from Manowly. A heavy fire that the garrison directed on the attacking forces of Capper thwarted the repeated efforts of the latter to reach the walls. Eventually the enemy attacked the gateway and carried the outer gate, yet found it too narrow to admit the gun upon its carriage. Consequently the gun, removed from the carriage, was taken to the inner gate in the face of a very heavy fire from the ramparts. The gate being burst open, the enemy made its access, fought its way to the inner fort, and gained control of the stronghold. The rebels suffered heavy loss in the carnage that ensued. On the 24th Lieutenant Colonel Montresor, at the orders of Wellesley, advanced to Jalloor. The armed parties led by the chief of Jalloor, had taken their position in the hill fort of Kataraghar. The British detachment attacked the insurgent parties, seizing the war equipment, which included four brass guns, one iron gun, excellent carriages, tumbrils and ammunition. Deprived of the possession of arms, the rebels sought no immediate contact with the enemy; they quickly evacuated the district of Kataraghar.⁸⁷

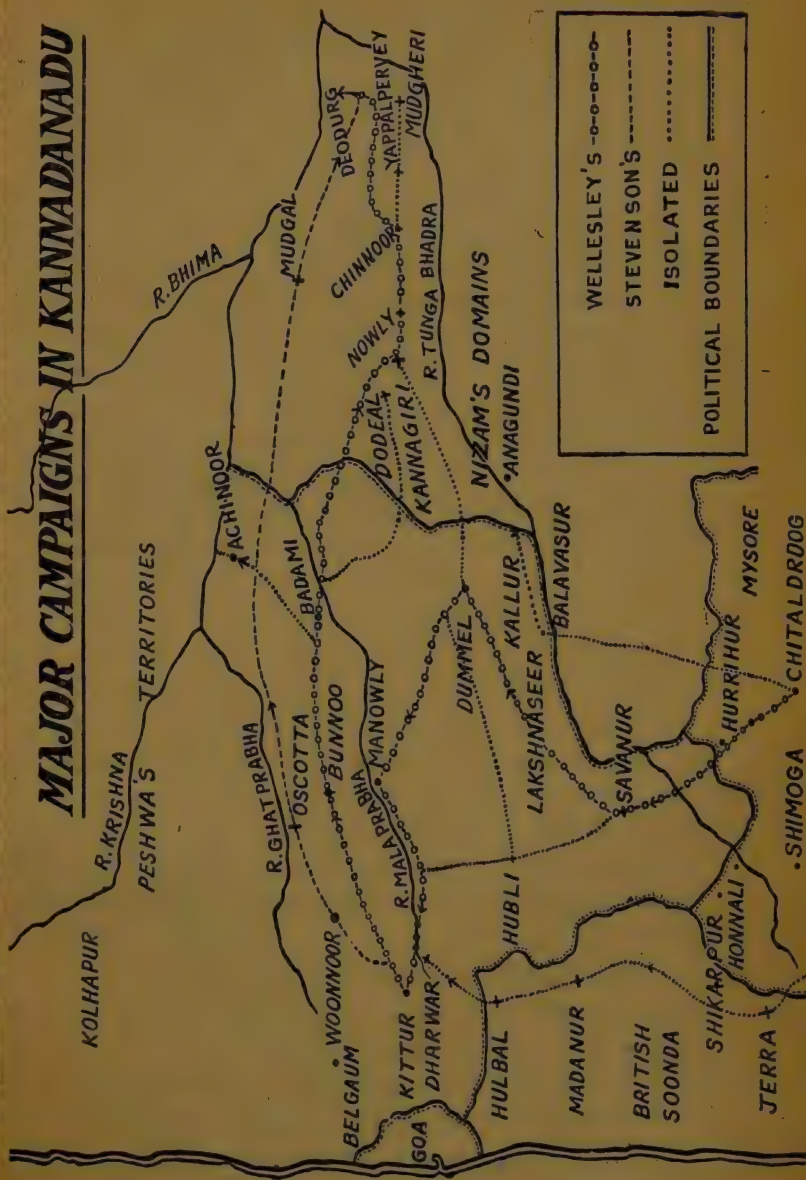
Fall of Dhoondaji Waug

On the 25th of August Dhoondaji Waug with a considerable body of armed men and all his baggage encamped within twelve miles from the confluence of the Malaprabha and that of the Ghatprabha with the Krishna. He made two marches towards

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4 September 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 697.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 459-460.

MAJOR CAMPAIGNS IN KANNADANADU



MAP III. Ref. Map No. 218, State Archives, Madras

Badami but on hearing Capper's advance against him returned eastward, moving into the territory of the Nizam. Expecting the arrival of the rebel force, Wellesley took his stand at Sirhingy, while Stevenson a few miles away on the bank of the Ghatprabha. The insurgents, however, evaded confrontation. Disappointed in his anticipation, Wellesley crossed the Malaprabha though it was deep and rapid and encamped on the 3rd of September at Jalihaul.⁸⁸ Two days later the detachment marched to the territory of the Nizam along the route taken by the insurgents. Because of the floods in the Malaprabha the arrival of the detachment of Stevenson had been delayed. After a junction had been effected, Wellesley and Stevenson formulated a scheme, aimed at bringing the prolonged operations to a quick end. It appeared to them probable that if the entire British army that was encamped on the northern region of Raichur Doab pressed the rebels from that quarter, they would move to Kannaghiry and Kopul to re-enter Savanur. However, in that event, it was feared, the disaffected inhabitants of Cannoul and the Tunga Bhadra valley would join Dhoondaji Waug, the rebellion would spread, the British communications with Mysore would be cut off and the insurgents would advance to Mysore in support of the confederates of the far South. To avert this dangerous possibility Wellesley decided to drive the rebels eastward and to take advantage of their movements. He brought his detachment southward, ordered Stevenson to take his position at Nooshy near Mudgal and directed the Maratha cavalry to move to a central place between the two British positions.⁸⁹ This hostile posture prevented Dhoondaji from taking his route towards Savanur. Yet instead of moving to the east, he recrossed the Malaprabha and returned to Gunjunder Ghur in the west.⁹⁰

In spite of this Wellesley decided to maintain a hot pursuit of the rebels. On the 7th of September he advanced to Kannaghiry, the next day to Baswapoor and the next day to Yepalperevy. A detachment, sent from Goa, reinforced the army. Colonel Capper's troops in the meantime marched along the right bank of the Malaprabha, stormed the rebel posts in the territory extending to that

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 471.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 24 September 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 273, pp. 1715-7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2 October 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, p. 533.

river's confluence with the Krishna and dispersed the rebel bands.⁹¹ For a few days Dhoondaji Waug had encamped at Malgherry, twenty-five miles away from Raichur, but on hearing that Wellesley's infantry had advanced from Hoolly to Chinnoor, about fifteen miles in his rear, he moved swiftly to the bank of the Krishna on the 9th of September. To his surprise he saw the camp of Stevenson on the road, upon which he returned to set up his camp, nine miles away from the camp of Wellesley near Bannoo. Reports indicated that the insurgents believing that Wellesley was at Chinnoor, set up their camp, not knowing the presence of the enemy at such close quarters.⁹² Upon the arrival of Wellesley at Chinnoor on the 9th two of the officials in the Nizam's government took uncommon pains to dissuade him from advancing to Yepalperavy, near which place the rebels by this time had established their camp. They gave false intelligence to the Colonel asserting that there was no road to Yepalperavy and that there was no water in that place. Finally they gave a guide to the British forces, but he pleaded ignorance of the way until he was threatened with death. Upon his arrival at Yepalperavy it became clear to Wellesley that every information that was given to him was totally false. The reason why the officials of the Nizam took so great anxiety in detaining the British detachment at Chinnoor was that the *Killedar* of this district had transmitted intelligence to the rebels that it was to halt at Nowly on the 8th and at Chinnoor on the 9th. This made it clear, as Wellesley had reported to Madras, that the servants of the Nizam had entered into a 'treacherous collusion' with the insurgents. Nevertheless the information that was transmitted to the rebels so completely misguided them that the enemy appeared before the camp of Dhoondaji Waug when it was the least expected.⁹³

On the 10th Wellesley moved forward, reaching within six miles of Konagal. He saw the rebel cavalry, 5,000 strong, on its march westward, apparently with a design of passing between the positions taken by the Maratha detachment and the Nizam's cavalry, which were supposed to be in the vicinity of Chinnoor.

⁹¹ Ibid., 30 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 525 and 527.

⁹² Ibid., 24 September 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 273, pp. 1715-7.

⁹³ Ibid., 30 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 500-517.

Upon the unexpected appearance of the enemy, the patriots took their stand between the village and the rock of Konagal. Taking the direct command of the Nineteenth and the Twenty-fifth Dragoons and the First and the Second Regiments of Cavalry, Wellesley put them in a line and ordered an immediate charge. Despite their marked inferiority in number and armament, the patriots fought with firmness and determination; but greatly crippled in strength, gave way. Among the heaps of the dead there was found the body of Dhoondaji Waug. In his death the confederates lost one of the greatest organisers and most talented heroes of the Rebellion.⁹⁴ The remnant of the vanquished fled. The British force continuing the pursuit seized the baggage of the fugitives, which was standing three miles away. It included numerous camels and elephants. The cavalry of the Peshwa and the Nizam chased the insurgents from place to place, killing more of them.⁹⁵

The enemy took effective steps to cut off the stragglers and to annihilate all rebel elements in a bid to prevent any recurrence of the insurrection, for Kirkpatrick, British Resident at Hyderabad directed Colonel Bowser: 'Not a member of the late rebellion but should be carefully extinguished'.⁹⁶ Accordingly, aggressive parties attacked and dispersed groups of the surviving rebels at different places. On the 10th the fugitives, who fled after their discomfiture at Konagal, reached the bank of the Krishna. The rebels of Sholapur, advancing to their support, rescued many.

⁹⁴ Dhoondaji Waug was sixty when he was killed. It is interesting to note the dark colours in which Sardesai, the great historian of the Marathas, has depicted this resourceful patriot. 'After the British conquest of Mysore he (Dhoondaji Waug) took to his old activities of plunder and destruction'. The success gained on Gokla Punt 'appears to have turned Dhondiah's head and induced him thereafter to commit boundless iniquities. Arthur Wellesley thereupon tracked him with a grim determination, and dividing the combined forces into three bodies began to scour the country, two moving along the two banks from west to east, and the third pursuing the adventurer closely. . . Wellesley's ingenuity was put to a severe test, but his measures and ample resources, proved effective against the poor lonely rebel'. (*New History of the Marathas*, 1948, pp. 361-2).

⁹⁵ Madras Council, 24 September 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 273, pp. 1717-8.

⁹⁶ Kirkpatrick to Bowser, Political Consultations, 30 September 1800, Vol. 1, p. 518.

However a force led by Stevenson appeared near Deodroog, surprised an armed party and routed it. The enemy destroyed the guns supplied by the Rajah of Sholapur to the insurgents, and captured the baggage.⁹⁷ Wellesley directed Saad-ul-lah and Noor Khan of the Nizam's regiment to guard against the possibility of the rebels reassembling in groups and to cut them off, if they did. Bowser took up a central position at Deodroog to intercept any resumption of rebel communication with their compatriots in Sholapur and recruitment of more rebels for further resistance.⁹⁸ While these measures were in progress, Wellesley encamped at Hullial, strengthened its defences and converted it into a British stronghold in the heart of the Maratha Empire with a declared objective of taking precaution against further outbreaks.⁹⁹

As the English had declared, the extent to which Dhoondaji Waug established alliances, the proportion to which the power of his resistance increased and the efficiency with which he organised the movement raised this first apparently desultory outbreak to the importance of a real war. The estimation in which he had risen in the western region of the Peninsula and the long drawn out warfare over an extensive region kept the English in constant alarm. The mobility and power maintained by the rebels all along this period not only kept the greatest portion of the British and allied armies in prolonged operation but also protracted the settlement of Mysore and excited the hopes of the rebels of a vast region, cutting across the frontiers of the British Empire, Maratha Empire, Mysore and Hyderabad. These events produced a critical state of affairs for the English in South India, as the Madras Council admitted, but the situation was finally tackled by a concerted effort by the alien power in co-operation with its Indian allies.¹⁰⁰

It is wrong to surmise that the rebels took a foolish risk and that the rebellion was bound to fail. The insurgents, taking advantage of the chaotic situation in the Maratha Empire and the mutual animosity of the chiefs, had entrenched themselves in the Kannada-Maratha territory, converting it into a base of their operations.

⁹⁷ Madras Council, 24 September 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 273, p. 1721.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 30 September 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 1, pp. 503-5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 11 November 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 275, p. 2520.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Clive, 30 September 1800, Secret Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 52-53.

The interlinking alliances established with the confederates of the far South and the extensive influence that they commanded, imparted a confidence of success to the patriots. Their co-ordinated strategy of simultaneous insurrection throughout the country, put into operation, though not very successfully, during this initial stage, distracted the enemy. But what changed the situation against the confederates were the failure of the Coimbatore plot, neglect of guerilla warfare by the rebels, concentration of British might on a select region and the unpatriotic attitude of the Indian powers. As the insurgents failed in their bid to capture Coimbatore, the confederates of the north and of the south lost the possibility of maintaining their direct communication and the hard-pressed Dhoondaji Waug found it beyond his ability to send his cavalry to the south, as it was promised. These unexpected developments had an adverse impact upon the course of the insurrection in the far South. The tactics of evasion of hostile pursuit and reliance on mobility together with the meticulous care taken for the collection of intelligence repeatedly enabled the patriots to baffle the enemy, but at times the former found themselves caught in pitched battles. Equipped with primitive weapons and lacking in discipline, they fell easy victims to the fire-power of the English. Had they followed their strategy of guerilla warfare, the aliens could have been reduced to dire straits. However it cannot be denied that the terrain of the country was not so favourable for this mode of warfare as that of the far South. The insurgents gained the support of the local inhabitants but all princes of consequence had allied themselves with the enemy. The Indian powers not only furnished troops and provisions but assisted the English as useful guides in gaining clues about the rebel movements in a land foreign to them. With the greatest Indian powers pitted with the alien power against the inhabitants, the patriots found their task quite unequal.

The fall of Dhoondaji Waug had serious consequences on the course of the Rebellion. An architect of the Peninsular Confederacy, he served as a powerful link between the rebel leagues of the north and of the south. The disaster that overtook him gave a blow to the expectations of the confederates of the far South, who pitched their hopes on gaining the support of his cavalry for their struggle. It jeopardised the possibility of drawing the numerous

Maratha chiefs to active conflict against the common enemy. As a result, the southern confederates were left isolated. The collapse of the rebellion enabled the Company to effect the settlement of the territories acquired from Mysore and the districts ceded by the Nizam subsequently by the Treaty of 12th October 1800. The Bengal Council conveyed its view to the Madras Council that the vigorous measures by which Wellesley suppressed the insurrection would facilitate the establishment of British authority in the extensive and valuable possessions ceded by the Nizam to the Company.¹⁰¹ In spite of this adverse turn of events Krishnappa Nayak of Bellum continued his heroic struggle.¹⁰² The Company planned to resume the operations against the patriots of West Mysore soon after the fall of Dhoondaji Waug but, pressed by the emergency created by the spread of the fighting to the southern provinces, again postponed it. The Madras Government reported to London 'the events which followed the defeat of Dhoondaji Waug connected with the late rebellion and the necessity of asserting the British power in Malabar and in the provinces involved in that Rebellious Confederacy rendered it impracticable to resume these operations. . .'.¹⁰³

The energetic and aggressive policy pursued by the English for the suppression of the rebellion had its repercussions on their relation with the Indian allies. It greatly assisted the extension of British influence in a sensitive region of India. The rulers of Poona, Mysore, and Hyderabad identified their interests with the enemy against the revolt of the people and drifted closer to yet more dependence upon the alien power. In the long run the policy followed by the Peshwa towards the suppression of this extensive insurrection reacted against his political interests and proved disastrous to the survival of the Maratha Empire. The discretion that was granted to the English for their military movements was utilised for ulterior purposes. It not only gave them a vital knowledge of the topography of the country but revealed to them how weak the Maratha military and administrative systems

¹⁰¹ Bengal Council, 10 November 1800, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 2, p. 902.

¹⁰² Madras Council, 19 December 1800, Political Consultations, Vol. 2, p. 902.

¹⁰³ Edward Clive, 17 February 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 32, p. 333.

were. Governor General Mornington declared it essential to remove all 'reasonable apprehension' of further risings and under this pretext instructed the British troops to continue to hold the several forts and posts from which the insurgents were expelled and a vast area of the Empire that was occupied. The period witnessed a struggle for power within the Maratha Empire and the English anticipated the outbreak of a second war with the Maratha powers. So great was his audacity that on hearing the conflict between Peshwa Baji Rao and Daulat Rao Scindia, Mornington instructed Edward Clive to proceed with the occupation of the Maratha land extending right up to the Krishna in the name of the Peshwa, on his receiving authentic intelligence either about the flight of the Peshwa or the imprisonment of him by the Scindia. He declared that the secure establishment of Colonel Wellesley within the Maratha Empire would help his quick advance on Poona if any emergency so warranted.¹⁰⁴ The political and military advantages gained by the Company with the treacherous collusion of the Peshwa against the patriots and ruthlessly exploited by the English in the promotion of imperialism enabled the enemy to administer a quick and devastating blow to the Maratha Empire in the war that broke out soon after the end of operations against the Confederacy.

¹⁰⁴ Mornington, 23 August 1800, letter to Edward Clive, *Secret Consultations*, Vol. 12, p. 118.

CHAPTER VII

CONVULSION IN MALABAR

TO SYNCHRONISE with the risings in Kongunadu and Kannadanadu Malabar drifted into a fierce struggle with the English. In April 1800 the patriots attacked the Company's posts, cut off communication and intercepted collection of taxes. The alien rulers had marched their forces to crush the Kannada rebels in the north-west and to deal with the serious situation created by the intrigues and defiant proceedings of the Tamil insurgents in the south-east. The confederate strategy had called for simultaneous outbreaks from different regions for the distraction of the enemy. The withdrawal of the troops from Malabar for counteracting the rebellious movement in Dindigul served as a powerful incentive. A combination of these factors precipitated the outbreak of rebellion in Malabar as early as in April 1800. In its initial wave it appeared sporadic and mild. It was obvious that it represented an endeavour, perhaps spasmodic, made in response to the rebellion of Dhoondaji Waug. However after the Coimbatore plot, it became extensive and formidable. The English made no immediate effort to counter the challenge from Malabar. Embarrassed by their conflict with the Kannadins and Tamils they restricted their activity to self-defence. After the fall of Dhoondaji Waug the enemy by a concentration of its forces sought a quick victory but the patriots, sheltered by the hills, engaged it in a long drawn out war.

Distraction of the Enemy

The intrigues of the leaders of Malabar with the confédérates of Kongu and Kannada lands had for a long time engaged the serious attention of the English. To nip the threat in its bud they formulated a plan to send two expeditions, one from the east and the other from the west. Colonel Arthur Wellesley, placed in command of the expedition from the east, was instructed to assemble a detachment at Srirangapatnam¹ while Colonel Sartorius, entrusted with the command of the expedition from the west, a force at Cannanore. The two detachments were directed to take the field

¹ Madras Council, 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 310-311.

against the insurgents in April 1800² but before this could be carried into effect the confederates threatened an expedition across Mysore in support of the insurrection in Kongunadu. This daring strategy introduced a new element of serious consequence to the imperial politics of the Company. To forestall this threat the administration directed Colonel Wellesley to hasten to the northern frontier of Mysore and to despatch the main body of troops, stationed in Malabar, for quelling the disturbances in Dindigul.³ As a precaution, the English gave no provocation to the insurgents of Malabar, lest the rebellion should spread. What they sought to do was to hold their line of defence. To attain this limited objective they stationed a body of troops at Kuthuparamba³ and deployed a detachment of the King's Regiment together with a battalion of Native Infantry⁴ and the troops of Mysore at the strategic places.⁵ In April the Madras Council reported to London that an unsuccessful attack on the rebels of Malabar would excite extensive outbreaks in other districts.⁶ Sartorius, who was entrusted with an expedition from Cannanore to the east, abandoned the venture in preference to holding the isolated posts, which the Company retained. He reported that as the forces were equal only to defensive operations, he found it impossible to change the nature of the struggle. 'The possession of Montana (Manatana)⁷ gave no authority to the Company in Cotiote (Kottayattu) and the original plan of fortifying it could not be carried into effect. Yet to abandon it at this critical moment was feared to produce the worst consequences'. He warned that if the British troops retired from this post, the Company would suffer the discredit of quitting a stronghold which the rebels would immediately occupy and would give the local people an opportunity of circumscribing the British operations and of extending their own. They would advance on the next post of the Company and press on some other quarter with

² Ibid., 1 April 1800, Secret Consultations, Vol. 10, p. 367.

³ W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 527-8.

⁴ Madras Council, 3 August 1800, Military Consultations, Vol. 272, pp. 608-9.

⁵ Ibid., 13 March 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 2, pp. 395-8.

⁶ Edward Clive, 14 April 1800, Secret Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 22.

⁷ Montana or Manatana was a British stronghold in the interior in Kottayattu.

the support of their allies. 'The question really is whether we should maintain this state of defence in what may be called the enemy's country or withdraw ourselves from thence. . .'⁸ In July 1800 Governor General Mornington expressed his serious concern at the failure of the British administration to re-establish its authority over the entire province. The successful course of the rebellion not only gave an incentive to the rebels in arms in other provinces but exposed the British Empire to foreign intrigues particularly of the French. He conveyed his anxiety to the Madras Council that the spirit of disaffection and rebellion successfully maintained in the heart of the British territory would aggravate the danger to the Company's interests in South India.⁹ In spite of this admonition, the English found it impossible to take any quick action for the coercion of the insurgents because of the risings in other provinces.

Consultation of the Oracle

The armed inhabitants, led by Kerala Varma, left the glens of the mountains in April 1800 and descended upon the valleys. At Kuttiyadi they were joined by the peasants of Iruvinad and the followers of the Mopla chief, Unnimoota.¹⁰ The Muslim insurgents, guided by Attan Gurukkal and Chemban Pokkar, took positions in the southern region.¹¹ Reinforced by the armed groups sent by the confederates of Coimbatore, they organised themselves into bands and prepared for the most desperate effort. In June they intensified their belligerent activity. They cut off British communications between Kurangot and Kuthuparamba, surprised the supply posts, spread themselves into the districts and established their authority. As resistance appeared futile, the administration of the Company withdrew either to the military posts or to the coastal towns.¹² Exuberant at these gains the rebels decided to storm Manatana, a stronghold and a key post erected by the

⁸ I. Sartorius, 31 October 1800, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 776-790.

⁹ Mornington, 1 July 1800, letter to Edward Clive, Military Consultations, Vol. 269, pp. 3572-3.

¹⁰ Board of Revenue, 4 May 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 282, pp. 5265-6.

¹¹ W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, p. 527.

¹² I. Sartorius, 31 October 1800, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 778-9.

Company in the interior of the district of Kottayattu for the purpose of control and communication.

On the 2nd of July the insurgents led by Edatara Kunjan, Kanjot Nambiar and Changoteri Chattu appeared in strength before the pagoda of Manatana. They considered the assault of this place as a solemn event, not only because the pagoda was the sacred abode of their god and goddess but also because they decided to embark upon a more vigorous struggle with the capture of this stronghold. Therefore they persuaded Kerala Varma to take over the direct command of the operation.¹³ Immediately after the rebel prince issued the order for attack, there came a demur from above. Taken aback by a combination of dismay and curiosity, the rebels decided to consult the Oracle.

THE ORACLE: Wherefore have the eight clans of Wynaad descended into this place and in arms? If without the orders of the gods you will be punished.

REBELS: We have descended agreeable to the command of Rajah Kerala Varma, but in obedience also to the gods of Poratera.

THE ORACLE: Appear in a body at the small pagoda, early tomorrow morning.

At the dawn of the next day the insurgents regrouped themselves into a single column, as was directed by the Oracle, and commenced a siege. Three muskets were discharged at the enemy but they were returned by four shots from the guns of the British post, wounding three of the patriots. The besieging parties now doubted the validity of their interpretation of the implications of what the Oracle had instructed them to do. They withdrew the siege immediately and instituted a blockade. Two hundred of them took their stand at an elevated position, that commanded the view of supply routes, 1,000 of them went to a western direction, while the rest went to Pazhassi. The troops of the Company seized and executed several of these rebels who were moving to their posts and carrying letters to the inhabitants.¹⁴

¹³ J. A. Wilson, 15 February 1801, Report to J. B. Travers, p. 1.

¹⁴ Translation of a palm leaf letter from a Nambiar to Pazhayavital Chandu, 23 July 1800, Diary of the Collector of Cotiote, pp. 1-2.

In a bid to reduce the British post, Kerala Varma called upon the people in the name of their deities to join his ranks. He wrote letters to the influential leaders, appealing to their religious susceptibilities. One of them, that was intercepted by the enemy, was addressed to Kulliaden Kutty Ambu of Kudalli. It read: 'If the Gods of the country Perumal and Bhagavati influence thy mind and if you have regard for me you will now manifest your friendship. It does not concern me what those enemies of mine who have sacrificed (deserted) their dearest concerns and abandoned their Gods may do or say to my prejudice. I will not change. Still, I assure you, I will oppose the power of the English however great it may be; I shall do my best in opposition. It is impossible for me after the insult that has been done to our Divinities at their holy Temple of Montana (Manatana) by the English, to do otherwise than revenge their injuries. Let all people know this, it is on the side of our religion I stand'.¹⁵ Again on the 10th of October 1800 he wrote to Ayalathu Nambiar: 'You must have heard that the Europeans have become powerful at Manatana, the sacred residence of Perumal and Bhagawathi, and that all the posts which they have established at Manatana and Kanjote there has been firing once or twice; as these things are done against Perumal and Bhagawathi exclusively, I am resolved to exert myself in opposition to the Company'.¹⁶

However, the relief expeditions sent by the enemy thwarted the attempt of Kerala Varma to capture Manatana. On the 3rd of August 1800 a Bombay detachment, led by Major Holmes, crossed River Merambi and advancing through Pazhassi, came to the rescue of the besieged. It dispersed the parties, relieved the post, and re-provisioned it.¹⁷ On the return of the troops from Manatana to Kuthuparamba, the rebels engaged them in a series of encounters. They killed seventy-six men of the detachment, but gained no decisive victory.¹⁸ As the evacuation of the British force made the situation favourable for an assault on the stronghold, the rebels again gathered in force. Compelled by this belliger-

¹⁵ Kerala Varma, 21 July 1800, trans., a letter to Kulliaden Kutty Ambu, *Diary of the Collector of Cotiote*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ Kerala Varma, 10 October 1800, trans., a palm leaf letter, *Diary of R. Hodgson*, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Diary of the Collector of Cotiote*, August 1800, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

ent posture, Major Holmes advanced from Kanjot on the 27th of September on a second relief expedition. The insurgents now withdrew to the jungles. On its way back to Kanjot, the rebels attacked the force with a galling fire, killing or disabling 100 of the troops.¹⁹

During the period that followed, the English sought to weaken the rebels through commercial restrictions. On the 3rd of October 1800 the Company issued a proclamation imposing a ban on the transportation of rice and other provisions to the rebel-held districts. It forbade any purchases being made from the people, who were in a state of rebellion. On the 10th of October it issued an order stopping the supply of provisions to the bazaars of Kotiangadi, Bengaat and other towns in order to remove the possibility of clandestine trade with the territories controlled by the insurgents. The British administration threatened that if any of them violated its orders he would be subjected to the penalty of death, and confiscation of properties.²⁰ Kerala Varma, on the other hand, decided to continue the struggle and issued appeals in the name of religion exhorting the inhabitants to extend their support. He sent his *taranga* or message to Nileswaram and other territories.²¹ The gifts of his personal magnetism were such that more sections of the population responded to his call. In November 1800 the inhabitants of Kottayattu, Hobili and Tekkankara armed themselves in defiance to British authority, moved to Patanoor, Meatady and Kowoor and entrenched themselves in the newly-erected barriers.²²

Emen Nair's Betrayal

Enabled by the termination of hostilities against the insurgents of Kannadanadu, the English diverted their military might against Malabar in November 1800. Wellesley was again directed to take the command of the operations. The united strength of the rebels and the difficult terrain rendered the task of Wellesley onerous. However to the jubilation of the enemy, Emen Nair, the rebel chief intimately associated with Kerala Varma, conveyed his

¹⁹ Diary of the Collector of Cotiote, 29 September 1800, p. 73.

²⁰ Diary of the Collector of Cotiote, 3 October 1800, p. 75.

²¹ Diary of R. Hodgson, p. 64.

²² Parleaty of Tekkangari, 10 November 1800, trans., a palm leaf letter, Diary of R. Hodgson, p. 107.

readiness to assist the enemy for the liquidation of resistance. The detailed knowledge of the hideouts of the insurgents and the familiarity with the topography of Malabar endowed Emen Nair with those requisites of which the foreigners stood in need for the formulation of their strategy.

In November 1800 Emen Nair went to Srirangapatnam, where the enemy assembled its forces for the expedition. He held a series of discussions with Wellesley, divulged the secrets about rebel concentrations and outlined a course of action, calculated to surprise the defiant people and throw them into panic. The traitor asked the English to send their forces to Wynaad by way of Coorg or Kankanikottai (Kakankote) and himself offered to lead the expedition.²³ Chattu Nair, another betrayer in the company of Emen Nair, declared to the enemy that the rebels of Malabar had been expecting succour from Dhoondaji Waug but the discomfiture of the confederates of the north had administered a severe check to their expectations and demoralised their morale.²⁴ Guided by their useful suggestions, Wellesley formulated a plan to begin operations with the reduction of rebel strongholds in Wynaad and to launch a simultaneous offensive against the patriots of Coimbatore and Dindigul. The proximity of the three provinces and the intimate association maintained by the defiant leagues rendered it essential to co-ordinate the military activities in this area.²⁵

As Wellesley was recalled to Madras by this time Colonel Stevenson was appointed to command the forces that were assembled in December 1800 in Mysore. Considering the risk involved in this difficult campaign, the Madras Government directed Stevenson to utilise the services of Emen Nair, as Wellesley did.²⁶ At the invitation of the Colonel, Emen Nair visited the British camp and again volunteered to lead the operations. In the light of a plan formulated by Emen Nair, Stevenson decided the strategy: to set up a post at Kankanikottai on the north-eastern part of

²³ Emen Nair, 1 November 1800, letter to Major Walker, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 731-6.

²⁴ Pazhayavittu Chattu Nair, 2 November 1800, letter to Major Walker, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 745-753.

²⁵ Edward Clive, 18 March 1801, Secret Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 66-76.

²⁶ Madras Council, 27 January 1801, Secret Consultations, Vol. 12, pp. 17-19.

Wynaad on the Mysore border, to occupy the rebel strongholds of Edatarakottai and Lakkidikottai on the Tamarasseri Pass and to open communications with Kozhikode. When these had been accomplished, Emen Nair at the head of his followers was to cut off the communications of the rebels with Attan Gurukkal in the south while the British forces were to subdue the interior country.²⁷ Colonel Sartorius in the meantime assembled his forces at Kozhikode instead of at Cannanore as formerly decided, for a simultaneous drive to the east. He decided to establish a post on the summit of the hill at Old Sacricola situated thirty miles east of Kozhikode on a supply route, to set up a chain of posts, and to open communication with Stevenson. Subsequently, he was to advance to the Peria Pass, then branch off towards Peruvayal and to strengthen the communication with Manatana. The occupation of Peria, the stronghold of Kerala Varma, was considered a necessity for further operations in the hilly region but it appeared almost invulnerable. The forces, therefore, proceeded to erect two posts on the way to Perown, two more at the foot of the Ghats, and two towards Peruvayal before they endeavoured to open communication with Kanjote.²⁸ The enemy in fact sought to co-ordinate its campaigns both from the east and from the west. As a complementary to the military strategy, it promoted communal animosity between the Muslims and Hindus. They rewarded the traitors with land and other properties confiscated from the patriots. These provocative measures were calculated as the best expedients for dividing the inhabitants into two opposing camps and for weakening the power of resistance. The immediate effect of this policy cannot be assessed. The Company stationed bodies of troops at Ernad, Valatara and Cheranad to cut off the rebel communication with these places and to prevent the Moplas from joining the rebel ranks.²⁹ The enemy obtained aid from its allies too. Velu Thambi, the Minister of Travancore (1799-1809), sent his Travancore battalions for the suppression of the patriots. These

²⁷ W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 528-34.

²⁸ Madras Council, 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3036-9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 February 1801, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 107, pp. 173-7.

The policy of divide and control proved suicidal in the long run. This fanned communal jealousy and led to the Hindu-Muslim clashes in subsequent times.

troops attacked the rebel concentrations in the south and intercepted communications with the confederates of the north.³⁰

Recall of the Forces from Dindigul

On the 21st of December the powerful detachment of Colonel Stevenson, left Mysore for the campaign in Malabar. Emen Nair joined the camp at Doulat Baig near Sultanpet for guiding the operations. On the 1st of January 1801, when the expedition reached the border of Wynaad, pioneers were moved into service for the establishment of posts at Kankanikottai and Manantodi.³¹ Two days later the troops, led by Colonel Boles, made a probe to the vicinity of Tamarasseri, a rebel stronghold commanded by Chumar Pokken. An attempt was made to surprise the post, but failed.³² After constructing a defensible barrier at Manantodi, the forces prepared to advance towards Periah and Banasoor. In the meantime Sartorius in the coastal region of Malabar and Innes in the hilly tracts of Dindigul moved into operation in an attempt to distract the attention of the confederates and to forestall the possibility of union of their interests and armed bands.

Despite the co-ordinated offensive by the enemy and its superior striking power, the patriots decided to hold their barriers. Establishing themselves in the woods and relying on guerilla tactics, they ambushed the hostile columns, seized their stores, isolated and cut

³⁰ Edward Clive, 18 March 1801, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 31, p. 275.

Velu Thambi, rendered meritorious service to the Company for the suppression of the patriots not only of Malabar but also of Tamilnadu. As a traitor to the national cause, he belonged to the order of Emen Nair and Raghunatha Tondaiman. A glowing verdict in idealizing terms, as given in *Trivandrum District Gazetteer* on Velu Thambi, is not justified. It declares: 'Velu Thambi was a man of deep patriotism and exceptional ability. . . A statesman of deep patriotism and an administrator of exceptional talents, Velu Thampi has won for himself an honoured place in the gallery of the greatest men of modern India'. (A. Sreedhara Menon, *Trivandrum District Gazetteer*, 1962, pp. 212-7). True that he revolted in 1809 but it was because he allowed his personal prejudices, not any enlightened interest, to dictate his official attitude towards the Company. His Kundara Proclamation itself bears testimony to it.

³¹ Madras Council, 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 2999-3002.

³² *Ibid.*, Vol. 281, p. 3022.

them off.³³ Thwarted in their bid to gain any definite victory, the Company found it essential to proceed systematically by employing its troops for the permanent occupation of the positions, it had acquired. This greatly reduced the effective strength of the detachment.³⁴ The hard-pressed Sartorius appealed for reinforcements. As no troops could be spared, Stevenson despatched an urgent message to Lieutenant Colonel Innes, who was engaged in military operations against the rebels of Dindigul, to rush to the relief of the besieged forces in Malabar and instructed. 'Your services will at present be of so much consequence that I do not hesitate to request you will march immediately on this service. . .'³⁵

Innes took prompt and energetic steps to comply with the demand. Before the end of January 1801, he despatched two flank companies of the Second Battalion, the Thirteenth Regiment and the Malay Corps as an advance force. After completing arrangements for the defence of the key positions in Dindigul, he himself at the command of another body of troops hurried to Malabar on the 10th of February.³⁶ In this development the confederates of the south saw a welcome and long awaited opportunity to liquidate the British authority in southern Tamilnadu. Well in accordance with their strategy of mutual aid, simultaneous insurrection and distraction of enemy and quite in consonance with the British anxiety that the aspect of affairs in the southern region was such that the departure of Lieutenant Colonel Innes for Malabar would be followed by flagrant defiance to British authority, they rose in arms.³⁷ In spite of this threatening development, the English decided to allow no slackening of the war effort in Malabar, for the Madras Government instructed Stevenson: 'The aspect of affairs in Tinnevely (Tirunelveli) and Dindigul renders the Governor in Council however extremely anxious that the detachment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Innes should be permitted to return at an early period of time as may be consistent with the success of your operations. This expectation which has

³³ Ibid., Vol. 282, p. 3043.

³⁴ Madras Council, 14 April 1801, Secret Consultations, Vol. 12, pp. 229-230.

³⁵ Stevenson, 12 January 1801, letter to Innes, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, p. 3026.

³⁶ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3421.

³⁷ Ibid., 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3444-5.

been excited by the armament under your command, the great importance of the object of its equipment, and the successful progress which has already been made render it expedient, that the war against the Pyche (Pazhassi) Rajah should be the principal object of our attention; and whatever may be the immediate event of affairs on the Southern Provinces the Governor in Council will consider it inexpedient to cripple your exertions by recalling prematurely any part of your force, at the same time therefore that His Lordship communicates to you the change of affairs in the districts of Dindigul and Tinnevely, I am directed to desire you will adhere to the system of measures already adopted for the suppression of the Rebellion in Cotiote (Kottayattu) and Wynaad'.³⁸

Changing Trend

On the 24th of January 1801 before the arrival of the relief expedition from Dindigul the main army of the Company, commanded by Stevenson, left Manantodi, where it had taken shelter, for a fresh offensive. It threatened Madakarai, situated four and a half miles away from Manantodi. Despite the impediments presented by the intricacy of the paths and extent of muddy fields it crippled the stubborn resistance of the rebels and gained possession of the town. Captain Western made an incursion into the rebel-held territory beyond Madakarai, but was counter-attacked and driven back. On the 28th, after consolidating their position, the invading forces occupied Valaad. Advancing through the hilly terrain, the enemy encamped at Periakulam, near the Peria Pass. The armed columns, who had occupied the heights of the remote hills, fired on the troops, but their attempt to check the hostile approach failed. A party led by Lieutenant Colonel Spry drove them to the interior of the woods. On the 29th Stevenson captured Peria Ghat, one of the strongholds of Kerala Varma. He seized from the vanquished a brass gun and dolphins, which were cast in the armoury of Tipu Sultan.³⁹ For the next few days he devoted himself to the consolidation of gains. The pioneers,

³⁸ J. Webbe, 20 February 1801, letter to Stevenson, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3087-9.

³⁹ Madras Council, 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3068-73.

whom he employed in considerable number, repaired and widened the roads and threw up barriers for defence in a commanding situation at the head of the hills of Manantodi. Having erected a chain of posts, the enemy re-established communication between Telli-cherry and Srirangapatnam.

In the meantime the expedition from the west had been caught in rough weather. The turbulent Chathappan Nambiar, at the head of a large body of armed men from Chirakkal and Kottayattu, fought a series of encounters with the British forces. In a resolute effort to storm the rebel stronghold of Irikkur the enemy advanced in strength but was beaten back.⁴⁰ The extensive woods gave cover to the insurgent attacks. To get rid of this difficulty the detachment of Sartorius, braving stiff opposition, cleared a road from Idumba to Pazhassi. On the 12th of February the troops commanded by Major Baird, again marched to Irikkur. Fierce resistance being expected, they moved without any heavy baggage. The forces launched a resolute attack on the barriers, but were again beaten back with heavy loss. The triumphant insurgents now issued a proclamation directing the inhabitants to remain united and threatening the traitors with death.

Defeated in a series of engagements, the Company's detachment retreated to Matinoor, situated on the bank of River Irikkur. A site having been selected for the establishment of a post, the troops cut a road and cleared a part of the wood. Bodies of rebels took positions on the way, yet did not challenge the enemy, perhaps due to want of adequate shelter in these thin and isolated jungles. Nevertheless the English abandoned their attempt to set up a post, for fear of being embroiled in constant harassment. On the 13th a party, led by Baird, made an incursion to Kallaloorkari, four miles away from Paychi and then to Naikalli. The insurgents lined on the route and shot at the flanking parties, but the fire was so remote that it did not deter the progress of the intruders.⁴¹ As Kallaloorkari afforded the needed facilities, the enemy converted it into a stronghold with enormous effort. On the 19th the entire detachment began another thrust towards Irikkur. The armed columns, who rallied in strength for the defence of the barriers, opened a galling fire all along the line of the flankers and resorted

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 3094.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 3112-5.

REBELLION IN KANARA, BEL COUNTRY AND MALABAR



MAP IV. Ref. Map No. 199. State Archives, Madras

to uninterrupted sniping. The resistance became so stubborn that Sartorius ordered a retreat.⁴²

Encouraged by these victories the patriots made a determined attempt to check the progress of the expedition from the east. Guided by Kerala Varma, the inhabitants particularly the Nambiar, mustered in considerable strength on the northern bank of River Bellipatam in Chirakkal. The detachment, commanded by Stevenson, moved from Peria Ghat to deal with the threatening situation. The rebels ambushed the attacking parties, launching a counter-attack. Unable to withstand the relentless pressure, Stevenson made a humiliating retreat. On the 22nd of February his detachment withdrew to Periakulam, and from there to the more secure post of Lakkidikota.⁴³

These reverses rendered the task of the enemy unattainable. The insurgents made substantial gains both on the western and eastern fronts. They not only retained control of Irikkur but humbled the forces of Stevenson and Sartorius. Though the position of the Company seemed quite critical, the patriots before long found this pleasing trend unsustainable. What changed the situation suddenly and drastically was the expedition of Innes from Dindigul. While the fall of the confederates of Kannadanadu deprived the rebels of Malabar a source of support from the north, the success of Innes' detachment in blocking the channels of communication from the south cut off the flow of aid from Coimbatore and paralysed the Mopla resistance in the southern region.⁴⁴ Thus on a vulnerable front, so far guarded by their allies, the rebels found themselves unexpectedly exposed to the enemy.

Flight of Kerala Varma

Threatened by hostile encirclement, the patriots evacuated their strongholds. One of their columns led by Kerala Varma, abandoning its positions in Kottayattu, took its course along the foot of the hills to Payyanur and then to Chirakkal. A second party headed by Chathappan Nambiar, joined the camp of Kerala Varma. Eluding the vigilance of the British troops the combined column

⁴² Ibid., p. 3127.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 3022.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 3121-2.

returned subsequently in March to their haunts in Kottayattu in an obvious attempt to re-establish itself.⁴⁵

Relieved of the threat of discomfiture as a result of Innes' expedition, Stevenson converted his stronghold at Manatana into a base of offensive operations. After strengthening it, he sent out parties on raids to trace the routes of the retreating columns. One of them, led by Lieutenant Colonel Cumine, and assisted by the followers of Emen Nair took its course to Pyencherry. On the 16th it recovered at Ayankana a bundle of clothes believed to have belonged to Kerala Varma. Chattu Nair indicated that the rebel chief might continue his movement through the unfrequented border of Coorg to enter Wynaad at Tirunelli. The general information furnished by the local inhabitants agreed that Kerala Varma had established himself in the north-east corner of Kottayattu, bordering on Chirakkal to the north and Coorg to the east.

Assuming the command of a body of troops of the Seventy-Seventh Regiment, Stevenson on the 16th of March marched in hot pursuit of the insurgents. He came upon the rebel retreat, but having received previous notice, the fugitives moved in haste after leaving the rice boiling in their pots and with their meals half finished. The assailants halted to refresh themselves. After discovering the track of the rebels, Stevenson by forced marches came up with the rear guard of the rebel prince. The enemy killed two of them and seized five. The rebels had been dressing their victuals in the deep bed of a river within 500 yards. In disorder and with the utmost haste they fled, leaving their pots on the fire. The forces took possession of arms, clothes and some finer variety of rice, believed to have been reserved for the meal of the rebel prince. The fall of night enabled the fugitives to escape to the fastnesses in the mountains.

On the 17th the detachment advanced to Ayankana, which was rumoured as the place of rebel retirement and to which direction a party under Cumine had already been despatched. After completing a long journey along the bed of a stony river, a local inhabitant, who served as guide, observed that the appearance of the country had so much changed since he had passed that way two years ago that he could not trace the way to Ayankana. Upon

⁴⁵ Madras Council, 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 281, pp. 3022-4.

the return of the detachment to the spot from where it took its course, it was recollected that a footpath had been seen in the morning leading up the hills to the eastward. At half past three troops followed this track till it was dark, noticing many evidences that Kerala Varma retired by this route. They picked up a large number of cartridges from the ground, a broken box of ammunition which the spies reported to be the last that the rebel chief had, and bags of rice and salt. The English halted for the night on the summit of a hill and the next morning having met with no rebel in spite of a pursuit of six miles returned to their base at Manatana.⁴⁶

The subsequent information indicated that Kerala Varma re-entered Chirakkal. After posting parties on the borders of Coorg to watch the rebel movements, Stevenson and Cumine advanced to Nellikana, where they arrived on the evening of 28th March. The insurgents, obtaining timely information about the approach of the enemy, made a precipitate escape. All the inhabitants, deserting their homes, fled with their leaders. The pots of rice and curry, which were still on the fire in every house, offered a good and welcome meal to the weary troops. The assailants now instituted a vigorous search of the rebel hideouts. Stevenson took his detachment again to Nellikana, while Cumine explored the hills in its vicinity and Major Walker sent *hircarrahs* to other directions in an attempt to trace the routes or to fall in with some inhabitants. In the meantime a company of troops proceeded to a river near Nellikana and dividing itself into two groups, one went up-stream and the other down-stream for long distances. All the inhabitants having fled their homes, left no other source of information than what could be secured from the travellers of remote villages. Evidences indicated that Kerala Varma on many an occasion made hair-breadth escapes. The spies whom he had employed transmitted timely intelligence so as to enable him to elude vigilance and to plunge into the woods.⁴⁷

Subjected to pressure in Chirakkal, the insurgents again returned to Kottayattu. Before they had cleared the district, one of their parties fell in with a patrol of the Company. In an exchange of fire the rebels lost one killed and four wounded but they carried

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3139-44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 3160-73.

off all casualties. In the course of their hasty retreat they left behind them provisions and clothes. On the 2nd of April Stevenson encamped at Irikkur which had been evacuated by the rebels. Driven from their strongholds the defiant groups established themselves in the Paralie Hills of Kottayattu.⁴⁸ As the trend of events turned in favour of the Company, Stevenson dispensed with the services of Innes' detachment and sent it for campaign against the confederates of the southern provinces.⁴⁹ However, all his effort to apprehend the rebel prince were baffled; he seemed to be on a wild goose chase.

Stevenson's Proclamation

On the 20th of April 1801 Colonel Stevenson issued a proclamation. It was addressed to the people of Malabar in general and of Kottayattu in particular. Calculated to spread suspicion and sow the seeds of division among the rebel ranks it depicted the British administration as lenient to the inhabitants, threatened the patriots with severe punishment, and offered to the traitors liberal rewards. Giving his own version of the developments, Stevenson directed the people to dissociate from the insurgents forthwith. Issued at Kuttiyadi the proclamation read:

'The inhabitants of Malabar in a series of years have experienced that their security and happiness were the principal aim of the Company's Government. But some wicked and artful men have disturbed the tranquillity of the country and have criminally opposed themselves to the benevolent views of Government.

'The whole of Malabar and the inhabitants of Cotiote (Kottayattu) in particular must be sensible that the power of the Company can reach an offender in the most secret parts of the Province. They have seen Kerala Varma, commonly called Pyche Rajah, chased in every direction and obliged to preserve a miserable existence by flying from public justice into the unwholesome jungles, where the punishment due to his crimes will soon overtake him.

'While the inhabitants of Cotiote and the adjoining districts have been spectators of this scene, while they have witnessed this just exertion of authority, they have experienced the utmost degree

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 3177-8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 3180.

of security. In the midst of the operations of war their persons and property have been invariably protected by the troops.

‘Colonel Stevenson observes with regret that the inhabitants of Cotiote have made an ungrateful return for this favour and while enjoying the Company’s protection they have maintained a secret correspondence with the Rebel Rajah and have concealed his flight or assisted him to escape from the pursuit of troops, since therefore they have not been reclaimed to their duty by gentleness and indulgence. Colonel Stevenson is determined to have recourse to means of severity—many of the rebel followers have been taken with arms in their hands or detected in an actual correspondence with the enemy, which in their situation, according to the customs of every nation, made their lives a just forfeit, but which have been spared by the mildness and forbearance of the English Government, the effect has been contrary to Colonel Stevenson’s expectation and has convinced him that it is necessary for the security of peace and good order that the culprits in question should be punished; therefore he now makes it public that it is his intention to banish them from this country and friends for ever. The same fate or death will attend all those who may in future be taken under similar circumstances.

‘The wanton and atrocious Rebellion which the Pyche Rajah has so long presumed to wage against the Company induces Colonel Stevenson to proclaim to all the inhabitants of Malabar that he will grant a reward of Rupees 10,000 to any person or persons who shall seize and deliver the said rebel up to any of the Company’s officers, or who shall point out the secret residence in such manner as shall lead to his apprehension. Since also the Kanote (Kanjot) Nambiar, Hydari Conty Kutti, Ezhambalam Kunjan, Wawan Rullenkuntry, Army Kydry Konti Kutti⁵⁰ and Changotery Chattoo are men who have been the principal adherents of the Rebellion, and from the heinousness of their crimes are incapable of pardon or any mark of lenity whatever, Colonel Stevenson hereby prescribes them and declares their property of every description confiscated to the Honourable Company’s Circar. As it is only by the apprehension of these bad men that the peace of the country and the happiness of the individuals can be secured, it is expected that every well-disposed inhabitant will exert himself

⁵⁰ The exact names of these anglicised versions are not clear.

to apprehend them. A sense of interest and duty ought to stimulate to this exertion, but should any person be so misled as to support, assist or anywise to hold a correspondence with the prescribed parties above named they shall be considered as traitors and liable to the punishment of rebels'.⁵¹

Condemnation of the Rebels

The inhabitants, steadfastly attached to the patriotic cause as they were, refused their assistance to the Company in disregard to the proclamation of Stevenson. They gave asylum to the insurgents and withheld all secret information.⁵² On the 4th of May 1801 Stevenson reached Tamarasseri, where he received intelligence that the rebel columns had established their positions at the foot of the passes of Elin and Kuttiyadi. Parties were rushed to the spot but the fugitives moved away rapidly towards the south. After reaching Banasore, the forces marched against a body of armed men assembled by Edathara Kunjan in Wynaad. Colonel Dessi, who led the expedition, saw the insurgents taking their stand on the summit of a huge rock. So steep was the ascent of the rock and so immense was its height that he found it impossible to gain the summit before the rebels moved away rapidly to safety. The detachment made a quick pursuit but failed to regain contact.⁵³ In May because of the advent of the Monsoon the enemy suspended military operations. The troops were distributed and placed in quarters with a view to preserve the security of occupied territories.⁵⁴

In July 1801 on the resumption of hostilities the English made a vigorous effort to disperse the rebels who had again gathered in groups. A force sent against Unnimoota routed a body of his followers but the attempt to seize his person failed.⁵⁵ Another

⁵¹ Stevenson, 20 April, proclamation, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3217-22.

⁵² Madras Council, 16 February 1802, Military Consultations, Vol. 294, p. 1518.

⁵³ Ibid., 15 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3203-7.

⁵⁴ Edward Clive, 3 June 1801, Secret Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁵ J. Spencer, J. Smee and A. Walker, 28 July 1801, Report on the Administration of Malabar, p. 45.

detachment gained a victory over the insurgents, who had gathered in a body at Karimpuzha and expelled them from Wynaad.⁵⁶ Troops went into action to the jungles of Kottayattu and Kadatanad. Harassed much, rebels of these districts escaped to the jungles of Atiote on the borders of Kurumbranad.⁵⁷ On the 4th of August Stevenson issued a second proclamation in an obvious attempt to induce the inhabitants to surrender their arms. He offered unequivocal pardon and restoration of all confiscated property if the rebels submitted to the Company and paid allegiance within the next six weeks. However it exempted the leaders of the rebellion who included Kerala Varma, Kanjot Nambiar and Edathara Kunjan from extension of indulgence. This proclamation too evoked no response from the population.⁵⁸

The military activities synchronised with a vigorous drive for the apprehension and seizure of the leaders of the insurrection. Guided by the loyal Nairs, the British troops seized several rebels from their hideouts. Resolved to eradicate all opposition and make a frightful example to others, the vindictive aliens enforced a policy of collous reprisal on the imprisoned patriots. On the 28th of July 1801 Chathappan Nambiar and Choyen Chandu were executed at Ibacour. Peruvayal Nambiar and two of his associates shared the same fate at Kanjot.⁵⁹ On the 21st of November Rehman, Kallu Chama, Puttian Kunjappan and Kannamcheri Nambiar were hanged to death in the public bazaar of Wynaad.⁶⁰ The troops of Lieutenant Edwards seized Kanjot Nambiar, considered the most inveterate enemy of the English, and his twenty-four year old son, who followed the fortunes of his father. Captain Taylor led the father and son to the Kanjot Hill where he beheaded them publicly.⁶¹ Changetteri Chattu was hanged to death at Kuttiyadi.⁶² Through a policy of terror the enemy sought a complete liquidation of patriotic resistance but its objective defied realisation for long.

⁵⁶ Diary of H. S. Osborne, 1801, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Correspondence relating to the Pyche Rajah's Rebellion, 23 July 1801, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4 August 1801, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 23 July 1801, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., November 1801, p. 93.

⁶¹ Ibid., 27 November 1801, p. 101.

⁶² Ibid., 6 December 1801, p. 105.

In its despatch to the Court of Directors the Madras administration claimed that the ability, patience and gallantry which distinguished Colonel Stevenson in the disposition of his forces, application of his resources and conduct of his marches in this arduous service resulted in the humiliation of the rebels.⁶³ Indirectly this verdict reflected the magnitude of the task that faced the Company but not the real extent of the success of its arms. Though part of the Coast was cleared, the hilly tracts continued under rebel control. Most of the patriots abandoned the plains only to find shelter again in the caverns of the mountains. Kerala Varma continued his resistance from the hills, while Unnimoota and Attan Gurukkal remained unsubdued.⁶⁴ In spite of this limited success, the English considered it of great importance in view of the prolonged and resolute struggle of the insurgents of Malabar and relief to the pressing demand for troops at a time when the confederates of the south carried fire and sword in Tamilnadu.⁶⁵

⁶³ Edward Clive, 15 October 1801, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 31, p. 136.

⁶⁴ Board of Revenue, 10 August 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 293, p. 9537.

⁶⁵ Edward Clive, 15 October 1801, Military Despatches to England Vol. 31, p. 137.

CHAPTER VIII

GALLANT STRUGGLE IN TAMILNADU

IN THE war for freedom Tamilnadu played as remarkable a role as in the organisation of the anti-British Confederacy. The patriots engaged the enemy in wave after wave of a grim struggle. The early outbreaks coincided with the risings in Kannada, Maratha and Malayalam lands. Thus in May 1800 the confederates raised disturbances in Satyamangalam, Dharapuram, Talamalla and Coimbatore and the rebel formations in the hills portended the spread of the rebellion to vast regions. However the English suppressed these initial outbreaks with promptitude, leading to the public execution of forty-two of the confederates involved in the Dindigul Conspiracy. A period of calm followed these reverses, but it proved deceptive, for before long there broke out a more violent storm.

Lull and Recrudescence

The collapse of the early insurrection initiated a period of lull in the freedom movement in Tamilnadu. It lasted from July to December 1800. Evidently the patriots were baffled by an unfavourable turn of events, for the Coimbatore plot failed, the communications with the rebel leagues of the north had been cut off, the expected cavalry of Dhoondaji Waug did not appear and the British vigil over the rebel movements had been intensified. Though the surface appeared calm, the currents of the rebellious movement were rumbling beneath. From Coimbatore the confederates shifted the centre of their activity to Tirunelveli. Already attempts had been made to revolutionise the province. Now they proceeded to work out the escape of the rebels imprisoned at Palayamkottai. The chiefs of Dindigul and Manaparai seized the collection of revenue from the servants of the Company. Early in 1801 the much expected 'horse' from the north appeared near Coimbatore and raised disturbances. It was possible that it constituted the remnant of the cavalry of the vanquished confederates of the Kannada-Maratha country.¹

¹ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 18 March 1801, No. 3579, p. 76.

As the circumstances demanded energetic action, in January, 1801 Gopala Nayak of Virupakshi and Yadul Nayak of Delli transmitted a secret message to other confederates urging the renewal of hostilities. Before long large columns consisting of the armed men of Dindigul, Tirunelveli and Malabar assembled in the hills of Virupakshi. The Tirunelveli rebels represented the hard core of the broken bands of Kattabomman's League. The leaders of Malabar extended their aid not only to sustain the rebel endeavour in the east but also to reciprocate what they received from the Tamils. The chieftains of Mangalam, Periapatti, Metranti, Mewadi, Tondamattur, Tengaivady, Ayotaripatti, Vadapatti and Somandorai, the members of the Dindigul League—at the head of their followers, took their stand in Delli. The confederates warned the people against payment of taxes and extension of aid to the Company under threat of chastisement. On the 31st of January the rebels attacked and subdued a post set up by the enemy near Virupakshi, destroyed a cutcherry and expelled the sepoys who made an attempt to enforce collections.² The rebels of Manaparaï attacked the British posts and assumed the administration of revenue.³ The Poligars of Ramagiri and Kadavoor gave leadership to the rebellion in Tiruchirapalli.⁴

Soon after the confederates renewed the war, the Company, determined to deal with the situation effectively, marched a considerable force against the Tamils. Lieutenant Colonel Innes, who was appointed to take the command of the detachment, was directed to combine his operations with Colonel Stevenson's in Malabar. Yet the confederates allowed no abatement to their defiant activity. On the other hand, as Innes had reported to Madras, since the army was assembled, the insurgents made every exertion to support their rebellious disobedience and collected every armed man. The disturbances in Malabar encouraged the possibility of active co-operation among the rebels on either side of the Western Ghats.⁵ He detached his Malay Corps and flank companies to storm a rebel stronghold in Virupakshi.⁶ Before this could be attained, he

² Board of Revenue, February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, pp. 1867-72.

³ Ibid., January 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 270, p. 78.

⁴ Ibid., 5 March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 275, pp. 2561-6.

⁵ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3426.

⁶ Ibid., February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 274, p. 1867.

was directed to send his forces on a relief expedition to Malabar. In the absence of the main detachment, the Company suspended its offensive operations in Dindigul, restricting its activity to holding its positions at Dindigul, Karur, Collumbum, Dharapuram and Palni.⁷ The enemy concentrated its power of coercion against the rebels of Malabar, but the spectacular turn of the struggle in Tirunelveli in the meantime came as a rude shock to them.

Exploit of 'Tiruchendur Pilgrims'

In 1799 upon the suppression of the Tirunelveli League the English threw into confinement at Palayamkottai seventeen of the defiant leaders. State prisoners of consequence, they were kept in irons in a small enclosure inside the fort. Two sentinels, who stood inside this enclosure, and a third at its gate kept a constant vigil over their movements, while the garrison maintained a strict check on the ramparts. In the course of their captivity, that lasted for fifteen months, two of the prisoners died; among the survivors were Sevatiah and Oomathurai, the brothers of Kottabomman.⁸

The confederates made repeated efforts to work out the escape of the prisoners. An early attempt was made by Marudu Pandyan, when he despatched his agents to Tirunelveli but they were apprehended and executed.⁹ Subsequently, the rebels of Panjalamkurichi appealed to Gopala Nayak. The rebel diplomat offered no specific aid immediately, yet agreed to shelter the prisoners if they made their escape and reached Dindigul. In reply to their appeal for assistance, he sent a message: 'Let them effect their escape and come to my Hills—they are very welcome here—they can remain here in safety for ten years and shall participate with me in what I can afford', but cautioned them to be 'very careful in avoiding dangers in the road as all the country between Palayamkottai and Veerapatchy (Virupakshi) was under the Company's government'. After the formation of the rebel Confederacy, the leaders bestowed more positive attention on the issue, as the success of the design seemed

⁷ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3435.

⁸ Bishop Caldwell, *Tinnevely*, p. 172.

The real name of Oomathurai was Kumaraswami Nayak. He was the only son by the first wife of the father of Vira Pandhyan and Sevatiah. (Revenue Consultations, 16 November 1798, Vol. 89, p. 3793).

⁹ Board of Revenue, March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 277, p. 2835.

a real necessity for the destruction of British influence in Tirunelveli. They employed Vira Pandya Nayak to gather armed men to make a surprise assault on Palayamkottai for releasing the prisoners. A probe was made late in 1800 but it was reported that the prisoners were afflicted with smallpox. Therefore the venture was postponed.¹⁰

It is not possible to ascertain who formulated the strategem aimed at the liberation of the prisoners. It represented an imaginative scheme which was carried into effect with a resolution that was equalled only by the daring of its conception. The history of India seldom presents so thrilling an episode. Late in 1800 the insurgents, establishing their base of operation somewhere in Panjalamkurichi, opened a secret correspondence with the imprisoned at Palayamkottai. The captives, having been directed to subsist on their own resources, employed servants to cook food. Potti Pakada, one of these servants, frequented to the nearby jungle to gather firewood. Requested by the rebels, he served as the agent of correspondence, transmitting verbal messages and at times carrying palm-leaf letters, kept hidden in his footware. Through his instrumentality the two sides took each other into confidence for the successful implementation of the plan of action.

In January 1801 when the different provinces drifted into rebellion, the insurgents, 200 in number, led by Pandyan Sherogar and Gidivetti Nayak, started from Panjalamkurichi. To excite no suspicion with the enemy or its agents the veterans had disguised themselves as pilgrims, going to the sacred Temple of Tiruchendur.¹¹ Clad in yellow robes, playing *kavadi*,¹² chanting *manthrams*, blowing the conch shell, distributing the holy ash and receiving offerings from the votaries, they reached Palayamkottai. The procession wended through the streets around the fort. On

¹⁰ Interrogation of Sevatiah, Board of Revenue, 28 December 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 305, pp. 15385-9.

¹¹ The Temple of Lord Subramanya or Muruga, son of Siva, at Tiruchendur is one of the most celebrated pagodas of South India. More than 2,000 years old, references about it are found in the earliest poems of Purananuru and Ahananuru of the Sangam Age.

¹² *Kavadi* is the wooden frame carrying the image on the weapon of Lord Subramania. The pilgrims normally move in groups taking any route, which they like, before they reach the temple.

listening to the chanting of spells, the prisoners to their great relief, whispered each other that the relieving party had really arrived. Before long the 'pilgrims' dispersed and vanished. A few days later they re-appeared in the town as hawkers, carrying loads of firewood, plantain leaves and fruits. The local inhabitants approached them for purchases but so exorbitant were the prices, they demanded, that all were dissuaded. With all their loads unsold, the hawkers moved to the street of the fort, shouting aloud 'firewood', 'plantain leaves' and 'fruits'. The sepoy of the fort wanted to make purchases but turned away on learning the prohibitive prices.¹³

Everything proceeded according to the predetermined plan. In anticipation of the arrival of the 'hawkers' Sevatiah gained the sympathy of the wife of the Superintendent of the Fort and implored her to obtain permission to them for the performance of ceremonies for the dead. He represented that being in prison he could not perform them for long and promised to do them with fetters on his feet. As he himself admitted subsequently, this white lady showed consideration and extended her assistance. At her intervention the Superintendent of the Fort granted the request and permitted the prisoners to purchase firewood, plantain leaves and fruits for the contemplated celebration on a grand scale.¹⁴ The prisoners having agreed to buy them at the high prices, as were demanded, the innocent-looking hawkers entered the fort and walked towards the enclosure of captivity, evoking no suspicion. In the meantime the women belonging to the prisoners and permitted to stay at liberty inside the fort, were sent away.¹⁵ Large parties of armed men with the consent and connivance of the residents of the town lay in wait with a few horses to assist in the escape and escort their leaders. Hundreds of them approached silently within a short distance of the south gate of the fort.¹⁶

At the appointed hour, soon after sun set, on the 2nd of February, Sevatiah gave the signal for escape. Immediately the

¹³ Panjalamkurichi Azhivu Charithira Kummi (palm leaf record), leaves No. 158-165.

¹⁴ Madras Council, 9 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, pp. 4292-4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, p. 731.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, p. 4294.

hawkers, equipped themselves with the weapons, which they kept concealed in the loads, sprang forward. They overpowered the sentinels at the enclosure, seized the fire-arms and carried off the prisoners with fetters on their feet with lightning speed. The enactment of the entire exploit, a major feat indeed, appeared so dramatic and the warhoop raised by them spread so great an alarm that the garrison was taken by complete surprise. All the veterans rushed to the Travancore Gate of the fort, disarmed more of the guards, seized their weapons and got safely off to their supporters, who were waiting impatiently with horses to escort their heroes.¹⁷ At this crucial moment the European community at Palayamkottai, about twenty men and women, were dining or dancing at the Garden House of Macaulay, protected by a single guard and the main British detachment had been cantoned at Sankaranainarkoil, about thirty miles to the westward.¹⁸

This remarkable exploit executed with no blood-shed, excited intense popular excitement. It altered drastically overnight, the political situation of the far South. It symbolised the triumph of a confederate strategy, unique in the annals of this insurrection. S. R. Lushington, the Collector of Ramnad, rightly reported to the Board of Revenue that the escape was effected 'in consequence of a general confederacy and preconcerted plan'. He asserted that the execution of the design was no less daring than rapid and that the sudden attack from the most unexpected quarter together with the warhoop raised by the veterans had deprived the guards of all reflection.¹⁹ At a secure distance from the fort the rebels halted for a while, put themselves in order and joined by thousands of armed men, pushed immediately to the Valnad Hills, a rugged terrain with thorny bushes in the eastern part of Tirunelveli.²⁰ For a time the liberated leaders appeared undecided where to proceed, whether to Panjalamkurichi or to Dindigul, but so spontaneous and extensive was the popular enthusiasm that their escape excited against alien imperialism, that it compelled them to

¹⁷ Ibid., 10 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, pp. 730-3.

¹⁸ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 51.

¹⁹ Lushington, letter to the Board of Revenue, 5 February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 273, p. 1453.

²⁰ Madras Council, 10 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, pp. 726-7.

stay on in Tirunelveli to spearhead the movement.²¹ Now, advance parties moved in all directions, surprising and reducing the British posts. Instantly the entire country was in open rebellion and the Madras administration expressed its concern that it would be necessary 'to make extraordinary exertions for augmenting the force in the Southern Division. . . .'²²

Confederate Collaboration

After the main body of the insurgents reached the Valnad Hills, Vira Pandya Nayak, one of the leaders, rushed to Shevalaperi to give notice to his family, residing at Arsady, to join him, for fear that the English would take them into custody. From Shevalaperi he led a body of rebels to Panjalamkurichi and routed a British force, stationed at Ottapidaram. These desperate men soon engaged themselves in the reconstruction of the fort of Panjalamkurichi, completely demolished in 1799 at the orders of Bannerman. After three days' halt in the Valnad Hills the rebel chiefs reached Panjalamkurichi but were surprised to see the tremendous progress made in the reconstruction of their former stronghold and to receive a tumultuous welcome from a large concourse of people.²³ They decided to stay on and the rebels proclaimed Sevatiah as their ruler.²⁴

The insurgents proceeded to consolidate their strength with the support of the people of Tirunelveli and the confederates of the north. Guided by the ideals of national unity and exigencies of the time, they left no stone unturned in bringing all sections of the population under the banner of revolt so as to present a united front against the common foe. They appealed to the chiefs and other inhabitants who had so long remained loyal to the Company

²¹ Lushington, the British Collector at Ramnad, reported to Madras that had these desperate and enterprising people moved to the north and occupied the hills of Dindigul, the difficulty of reoccupying them by the English would have been ten-fold greater than what they experienced in their conflict with the insurgents of Dindigul. The plains of Tirunelveli appeared unsuitable for guerilla war by the confederates. (Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 13 December 1801, No. 3579, p. 239).

²² J. Webbe, 20 February 1801, letter to Stevenson, Military Consultations, Vol. 282, pp. 3087.

²³ Lushington, 13 December 1801, letter to Board of Revenue, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 239.

²⁴ Report of the Board of Revenue, 20 February 1801, Vol. 3, p. 45.

for support and sought to reconcile them to the patriotic cause. Sevatiah's letters to the inhabitants of Karcherry and the Poligar of Wootamalai reflected the liberal sentiments cherished by the insurgents. He wrote to the inhabitants of Karcherry: 'It has been represented to me that in consequence of supplies of provisional articles having been collected and sent from your country for the Company, a party of the force from Valnad had marched and committed disturbances in your country. As Dattappa Nayak and Sivasubramania Pillai (two rebel administrators) are in the Hills (Valnad Hills), I have directed them to settle everything to your wish. You would therefore fearlessly remain in your village trusting in me, paying your *deshakaval*²⁵ and to attend to duties'.²⁶ Maruthappa Tevar, the Poligar of Wootamalai, fought on the British side against the Tirunelveli League. In spite of this Sevatiah sought to conciliate him and win his alliance. On the 7th of February 1801 he wrote to Maruthappa Tevar: 'That by the mercy of Ninar (God), we have all made an escape from Palayamkottai and arrived at our place. You will now drop all thought of what you suffered from us in former times and co-operate in our business without any difference arising'.²⁷ So spontaneous was the patriotic fervour that the insurrection excited among the masses, that it drew into its ranks people from all communal and linguistic groups. The servants of the Nawab and the *kavalkars* of the villages rallied to the movement.²⁸ The Paravas, the fishermen community of the coast, led by their *Jatitalavan* or head man not only joined the rebellion but supplied guns, wall pieces and powder for the promotion of the violent struggle.²⁹ As the populous communities of the Marawas, Nadars and Totiens too rose in arms, the resistance assumed formidable proportions.³⁰ Hopeful that the Rajah Serfoji of Thanjavur and

²⁵ *Deshakaval* was a nominal fee paid by the villagers for the *kaval* or police duty performed by the local administration.

²⁶ Sevatiah, *cowl* to the village of Karcherry, trans. from Tamil, n.d., Military Consultations, Vol. 285, pp. 4995-6.

²⁷ Sevatiah, 7 February 1801, palm leaf letter to Maruthappa Tevar, Translation, Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 274, p. 2043.

²⁸ Madras Council, 10 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, p. 728.

²⁹ Ibid., 23 February 1801, Ibid., Vol. 279, p. 988.

³⁰ Ibid., 13 March 1801, Ibid., Vol. 280, p. 1481.

Rajah Raghunatha Tondaiman of Pudukkottai would identify their interests with the nationalist cause, the leaders sought their aid, but were disappointed; these princes entertained no sympathy.³¹

The confederates, however, rushed to the assistance of their comrades at arms. A body of rebels from Sivagiri in the western region of Tirunelveli reinforced the armed column of Sevatiah.³² Emissaries went to Sivaganga, Ramnad and Dindigul for the acquisition of arms and reinforcements.³³ This was followed by a conference of the leaders at Kadalgudi. Melappan of Ramnad, Nagaraja Monigar of Tirunelveli and *Jatitalavan* of Tutukudi held a meeting but as their deliberations were held in secret, the details cannot be ascertained. Melappan visited Panjalamkurichi and was received with the presents of ear-rings, necklace, bangles and cloths. He rode back escorted by a hundred men of Panjalamkurichi. On his return to Ramnad, a hundred loads of arms and twenty loads of ammunition, mostly powder and ball, were moved to Panjalamkurichi. The *Amildar* of Komeri reported to Collector Lushington that the rebels of Sivaganga from their jungles of Kalayarkoil sent armed groups and provisions to Tirunelveli.³⁴ Sevatiah had admitted subsequently that 30,000 insurgents of Ramnad and Sivaganga joined him soon after he entered Panjalamkurichi in triumph.³⁵ For the promotion of co-ordination of the war effort, Marudu Pandyan stationed Subbayyan in Tirunelveli and Mandala Manikkam in Ramnad.³⁶ Oomathurai and Sevatiah in their message to Marudu Pandyan conveyed their sentiments: 'The present time has given us hopes of succeeding in our enterprises. We have placed entire confidence in them, and thus far effected our object, and wait to be responsible for whatever may hereafter happen'. They asserted that all the chiefs except the Poligars of Ettayapuram and Wootamalai were ready to support the rebellion. That so long they had seized from the enemy 200 muskets, eleven tents, numerous bullocks and 3,000 *chakrams*. As they needed

³¹ Ibid., 15 March 1801, Ibid., Vol. 280, p. 1644.

³² Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 23 March 1801, No. 3579, p. 88.

³³ Madras Council, 17 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, p. 880.

³⁴ Amildar of Komeri, 1 March 1801, palm leaf letter to Lushington, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, pp. 69-72.

³⁵ Sevatiah, letter to Rajah of Tanjore, Military Consultations, 9 June 1801, Vol. 284, p. 4295.

³⁶ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 1 March 1801, No. 3579, p. 69.

gun-powder urgently, Sevatiah appealed to Marudu Pandyan to send fifty loads without delay.³⁷ A deputation sent by the insurgents reached Dindigul and returned with the people of Tirunelveli who were serving with their allies.³⁸ The confederate support greatly strengthened the cause of rebellion in Tirunelveli.

Leadership of Oomathurai

Oomathurai, otherwise called Kumaraswamy, assumed the command of rebel operations in Tirunelveli. A unique phenomenon, that this popular movement found in this deaf and dumb man of very sickly appearance its undisputed leader. So great was his popularity that he was known by different appellations but of the same meaning: 'Oomee' or 'Dumb' among the common people, 'Mookah' among the Mohammadans and 'Dumb Brother' (of Kattabomman), 'Dumb Boy' or 'Dumby' among the English. The rebels reverentially referred him as *Swamy*, literally meaning deity. The personal appearance of Oomathurai seemed deceptive. Though sickly, he possessed a masterful mind and commanded the absolute loyalty of his people. James Welsh, who had an intimate knowledge of this hero, had declared 'he was one of the most extraordinary mortals I ever knew.' He asserted 'the Oomee was adored, his slight sign was an oracle, and every man flew to execute whatever he commanded. No council assembled at which he did not preside, no daring adventure was undertaken which he did not lead. . . . Whatever undisciplined valour could effect, was sure to be achieved wherever he appeared. . . .'³⁹ An enterprising character and a restless spirit, he was a leader—violent and rough yet the gifts of his personal magnetism were such that he was passionately loved and affectionately adored.

A deadly enemy of the English, he master-minded the formulation and execution of those plans which were aimed at the annihilation of imperialism. Together with his brother Kattabomman he engineered the organisation of the Tirunelveli League against the Company in 1798. He accompanied his brother to Ramnad and when the sepoy appeared to arrest Vira Pandyan he alerted his

³⁷ Subbaiyan, 18 February 1801, trans., letter to Marudu Pandyan. Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, pp. 62-63.

³⁸ Board of Revenue, 5 March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 275, p. 2553.

³⁹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 131.

followers and manoeuvred the escape.⁴⁰ When hostilities broke out, he led his men in the successful defence of Panjalamkurichi. More conspicuous and colourful than Vira Pandyan, Oomathurai was the *de facto* leader of the anti-British reaction of 1799. So profound was the affection of Kattabomman for his dumb brother that even when he was taken to the gallows, he expressed his anxiety for the life of Oomathurai. Subsequently together with other patriots he was thrown into prison at Palayamkottai but made his escape in February 1801. Since then he devoted himself to successive assaults on hostile positions and destruction of British authority. His method of representing the English was extremely simple. Oomee collected a few little pieces of straw, arranged them on the palm of his left hand to represent the British force; then with other signs characteristic of a dumb man and a whizzing sound, drew the other hand across and swept them off. This was the signal for attack.⁴¹ The exploits of Oomathurai imparted a real thrill and intensity to the struggle that followed.

Capture of Tutukudi and Komeri

The reoccupation of Panjalamkurichi from the enemy was a turning point in the movement, for the tide of rebellion marked by brilliant victories, began to sweep the country violently. The rebels established themselves in force and within a short space of six days reconstructed the bastions and walls of the demolished fort with mud, sand and husk, making them defensible.⁴² The principal inhabitants, the peasants, peons and *kavalgars*, as the English themselves had admitted, cheerfully obeyed the summons from their leaders and joined the insurrection.⁴³ The parties equipped themselves with firelocks, which were seized from the enemy, attacked the British posts and rescued from prison Karutiah of Kadalgudi and Virabhadra Pillai, brother of Sivasubramania Pillai, who were involved in the organisation of the Tirunelveli League.⁴⁴ Their extensive ravages led to the complete annihilation of British authority in the eastern region of the province. The

⁴⁰ Board of Revenue, 11 April 1799, Proceedings, Vol. 224, p. 3070.

⁴¹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 131.

⁴² Madras Council, 13 April 1802, Military Consultations, Vol. 296, pp. 2504-6.

⁴³ Ibid., 10 February 1801, Ibid., Vol. 279, pp. 733-4.

⁴⁴ Board of Revenue, 5 February 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 273, p. 1451.

Company sent forces to the disturbed areas in an attempt to check the spread of the rebellion but were forced to retreat.⁴⁵

The pillaging parties spread themselves in all directions, surprised the British posts, released prisoners and seized the stores. Alwar Tirunagari, Srivaikuntam, Kulattur, Kadalgudi, Nagalapuram, Kolarpatti and Yezhayirampunnai fell to the storming parties. The insurgents rebuilt the demolished forts, converting them into their strongholds.⁴⁶ On the 3rd of March they advanced to Tutukudi, a commercial centre of considerable importance, and surrounded the fort. Edward Ormsley, who commanded the garrison, ordered the sepoys to open fire, but the latter made common cause with the patriots. They handed over the arms to the insurgents and surrendered the fort. In spite of this victory the rebels showed magnanimity to the humbled foe. They permitted Edward Ormsley to gather all his properties and go away to safety.⁴⁷ However they took Baggot, the Master Attendant, prisoner. Overcome with affliction, his panic-stricken wife followed the rebels, entered the fort unmolested and made entreaties. Taking pity, the rebel leaders Oomathurai and Sevatiah, with no hesitation whatsoever granted her request; they not only released Baggot from custody but restored all his confiscated properties. In fact even in their attitude towards their deadly enemy the patriots observed the maxims of magnanimity and chivalry.⁴⁸ They did no harm to the Dutch, for they considered them neutral.⁴⁹ After consolidating their control over the coastal strip, they made preparations for the capture of Tirunelveli. They made ladders in the Valnad Hills and gathered the inhabitants for the expedition.⁵⁰ However, before this could be attempted, they were confronted with a powerful British offensive against Panjalamkurichi.

The insurgents of Sivaganga and Ramnad during this critical period not only assisted their allies in Tirunelveli but engaged the English in their own lands. In February and March they gained more victories. Led by Melappan, a rebel column attacked and

⁴⁵ Madras Council, 10 February 1801, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 279, p. 733.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13 April 1802, Ibid., Vol. 296, pp. 2505-6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11 March 1801, Ibid., Vol. 280, pp. 1469-72.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15 March 1801, Ibid., Vol. 280, p. 1616.

⁴⁹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Madras Council, 7 July 1801, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 285, p. 4990.

defeated the British forces, stationed at Abiramam and Kadamalur, leading to the reduction of these posts.⁵¹ On the 8th of March the rebel chief led an expedition to Komeri, a strong fort, where the enemy maintained a powerful garrison under the command of Miller. He destroyed the massive gates of the citadel and stormed through the barriers. Finding the odds insuperable, the beleaguered evacuated it; and the fort fell under rebel control. Miller, reinforced at Abiramam, moved on Komeri, seeking to regain possession of the fort. Determined to check the enemy, the armed columns of Melappan, moving to the bank of a tank situated between a jungle and a deep nulla, grouped themselves into a half-moon-shaped line in front of the British camp. The enemy crossed the nulla, formed into a line, advanced rapidly to the tank-bund and launched a fierce attack. The insurgents, considering their position insecure, eluded the charge and retired to the jungles.⁵² On the 12th when they were on their march to Paramagudi the detachment of Miller surprised and encircled the party. However Melappan proved equal to the task, he fought heroically, broke the hostile cordon and led his men to safety to the jungles.⁵³ Joined by a considerable body of rebel troops, sent by Marudu Pandyan, Melappan emerged from the jungles and defeated the enemy in successive engagements. He liberated Sholagramam, Veravani, Chengalpadi and Paratawayal from the British control. An armed column of Sivaganga administered a severe blow to the Company's force stationed at Nettoor. The rebels established their authority in most of Ramnad, but found it difficult to reduce the walled towns, to which the Company's administration had withdrawn, for want of fire arms and to sustain a prolonged campaign for shortage of grain in this famine-affected province.⁵⁴

Retreat of Macaulay

As the tide of insurrection swept over the country, the English canalised all the resources at their command in their attempt to

⁵¹ Amildar of Abiramam, 10 March 1801, palm leaf letter to Lushington, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 74.

⁵² Board of Revenue, 23 March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 278, p. 3318.

⁵³ Amildar of Abiramam, 14 March 1801, letter to Lushington, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 74.

⁵⁴ Mittadar of Kilcaud, 20 March 1801, letter to Lushington, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 81.

check its tempo. Colin Macaulay, the commanding officer of the forces in Tirunelveli, issued a proclamation threatening with death all those who were found in arms or assisting the rebels with arms and provisions. He directed the loyal chiefs to gather information on rebel movements and concentrations.⁵⁵ To terrorise the inhabitants three of the rebel emissaries, who were on missions seeking support of the people but seized, were hanged to death.⁵⁶ In his endeavour to weaken the will of the defiant population, he sent parties on raids to the rebel territories to capture the families of the principal inhabitants⁵⁷ and to cut off their communication with the confederates of the north.⁵⁸

Macaulay initiated effective measures for a powerful offensive on Panjalamkurichi. He assembled 'the whole disposable force of the province' of Tirunelveli at Sankaranainarkoil.⁵⁹ At his suggestion, Velu Thampi, the Minister of Travancore, rushed his troops in support of the enemy against the patriots.⁶⁰ Advancing through Kayatar the forces under the command of Macaulay on the 8th of February reached Kadayanellore, six miles short of Panjalamkurichi. In the evening the enemy pitched tents. No sooner did troops get ready to take their meal than they found their camp attacked by hordes of assailants. Determined to forestall the threat to their reconstructed stronghold, the rebels, advancing under the cover of a deep ravine, made a sudden and simultaneous attack on three sides of the British camp. The besieged charged the rebels and forty of the latter fell dead, yet their attempt to disperse the assailants failed. In the evening the Company's troops formed themselves into a square with guns at the angles and baggage in the centre. In this position they lay on their arms, subjected to repeated alarms the entire night.⁶¹

On the 9th morning the forces, resuming their march, took position near Panjalamkurichi. They decided to rout the rebels

⁵⁵ Madras Council, 7 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, pp. 881-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 21 February 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 3, pp. 344-5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13 March 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 280, pp. 1483-5.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7 February 1801, Ibid., Vol. 279, p. 499.

⁵⁹ Edward Clive, 25 February 1801, letter to Mornington, Secret Consultations, Vol. 12, p. 231.

⁶⁰ Madras Council, 29 December 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 5, p. 1654.

⁶¹ Ibid., 17 February 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 279, pp. 886-7.

in a quick action but to their astonishment they found the citadel—which had been completely demolished in 1799—‘raised, as it were by magic in six days’: Macaulay reconnoitered the fort, but discovered to his dismay every part of it, well manned by thousands of insurgents. As a quick victory seemed highly dubious, he pitched his tent and decided on an assault in the night. A body of troops advanced to capture the Pagoda of Ottapidaram in the meantime. As soon as this expedition had been sent, it found itself surrounded by thousands of armed men who appeared on the rear and flank. So daring and resolute was the probe made by the rebels that it convinced Macaulay of the magnitude of the lurking danger. He reported to Madras that the fort in view was found heavily guarded by men beyond all calculation. Meanwhile a huge column of rebels assembled in the Valnad Hills. The shrewd enemy anticipated the possibility of simultaneous rebel thrusts, one from Panjalamkurichi and the other from the Valnad Hills against its camp. At the same time the Company’s sepoys were found incapable of sustained operations either on account of demoralisation in their ranks on account of their repeated reverses at the hands of the rebels, or because of their sympathy for the patriots. Considering his position extremely precarious, Macaulay ordered a sudden retreat. Under the guise of preparing for an offensive, the British army misled the rebels and began a humiliating withdrawal. When the enemy moved away, accomplishing a third of its journey to Palayamkottai, the mistaken impression revealed itself to the rebels. Soon they overtook the English with shouts and screams. There followed a running battle. The patriots lost 110 of their men killed in a series of clashes, yet continued their chase of the enemy. After a long and severe march, which lasted all the night, the troops reached the protection of the batteries of Palayamkottai at nine in the morning of the 10th of February.⁶²

Anxious to retrieve the shattered prestige, Macaulay now decided to capture Nagalapuram and Kadalgudi, two important centres of the rebellion. These posts were of particular importance, for it was through them that the confederates of Tirunelveli maintained communications with their allies of the northern provinces, particularly of Sivaganga and Ramnad.⁶³ At the orders of

⁶² Ibid., 17 February 1801, Ibid., Vol. 279, pp. 888-893 and Ibid., 14 April 1801, Secret Consultations, Vol. 12, pp. 231-2.

⁶³ Ibid., April 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 281, pp. 1970-2.

Macaulay, Lieutenant Miller captured Nagalapuram and intercepted the rebels' communication. Captain Hazard, reinforced by a detail sent from Madurai marched on Kadalgudi. Anxious to avert the threat of isolation from their allies, the rebels gathered in strength for the defence of this post and by a stubborn resistance repulsed the attack. A second assault was tried but that too failed. Consequently, English troops retreated to Nagalapuram, being harassed by armed men throughout the march.⁶⁴ On the 15th of March the rebels, rallying in force, began a counter-attack on the British detachment, stationed at Nagalapuram, but without success. Subsequently on the 19th of March they directed all their effort for the reduction of the British post at Srivaikuntam to submission. They erected a mud work with considerable labour, gained a commanding view of the pagoda and cut off the enemy's communication. Major Sheppard now led an expedition from Palayamkottai for the relief of the besieged post. He succeeded in forcing his way into the pagoda, but failed in beating the crowds. Finding it impossible to maintain the post, the garrison evacuated it, retreating to Palayamkottai.⁶⁵ In fact, rebel unity and valour triumphed over British discipline and arms.

The Battle of Panjalamkurichi

Incensed at the repeated reverses and threatened with the destruction of their power, the English made a vigorous attempt for a fresh military build-up. At the orders of General Brathwaite, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the Madras Presidency, detachments from the northern provinces moved into Tirunelveli. On the 27th of March a grand army assembled at Kayattar. Commanded by Macaulay, it reached on the 30th at Pasuvanthanai, where the troops of Ettayapuram made their junction. Soon after this was effected, the advancing army was completely surrounded by a formidable force. The patriots, though ill-equipped, attacked the English with uncommon determination. In the fierce battle that followed, the besieging party lost ninety-six men killed. Failing to capture the enemy's guns and subjected to more losses, these 'brave but unskilful pedestrians' as James Welsh described these crowds, withdrew to a nearby jungle.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 13 March 1801, Ibid., Vol. 280, pp. 1477-9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21 March 1801, Ibid., Vol. 280, pp. 1681-3.

DHARMAPURI



On the 31st of March the enemy marched to Panjalamkurichi, now completely reconstructed by the insurgents. Built of mud of a very solid and adhesive quality, the wall was generally thirteen feet high.⁶⁶ Macaulay concentrated his forces on the north-west angle of the fort, throwing out the cavalry to the south and the troops of Ettayapuram to the east. When all the arrangements were carried to perfection, he ordered the assault. The heavy guns, mounted on an elevated spot, opening a heavy fire, commenced breaking the north-west bastion. The howitzers and field pieces enfiladed the western and northern faces of the fort. A part of the wall collapsed, and at 3.00 p.m. on the 31st of March the breach appeared perfectly practicable. The European details, supported by the native infantry, immediately moved forward in strength to the breach 'under the heaviest fire imaginable'. The gallant assault of the powerful enemy, however, did not deter the insurgents from their determination to challenge and contest. With intrepid firmness and unconquerable daring, they engaged the English in a fierce charge. The moment the assailants advanced to the breach, they were piked or shot. Successive attempts were made to cripple the rebel resistance but were repeatedly thwarted. The troops of Ettayapuram, supported by the Company's batteries, attacked the east face of the stronghold but fared no better than their allies.⁶⁷ During the entire duration of this battle, the defenders kept up the most unnatural yell, which ceased only with the complete repulse of the assault. Humiliated by this unexpected discomfiture, Edward Clive, Governor of Madras, reported to the Court of Directors that the English troops 'after sustaining an unequal conflict against a superior force, with unshakable bravery and discipline, were repulsed with heavy loss'.⁶⁸

Overwhelmed with sad recollection of this tragedy, James Welsh, one of the officers who fought in the British army, had narrated in his *Military Reminiscences*: 'At length a retreat was ordered, and a truly dismal scene of horror succeeded, all our killed, and many of the wounded lying left at the foot of the breach, over which the enemy (the rebels) immediately sprung and pursued

⁶⁶ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 61-62.

⁶⁷ Madras Council, 7 April 1801, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 281, pp. 2007-8.

⁶⁸ Lord Clive, 2 May 1801, letter to Court of Directors, *Secret Despatches to England*, Vol. 2, p. 81.

the rear, while others pierced the bodies both of the dying and the dead. . . . As all had alike partaken in the dangers and discomfort of the day, a dead silence reigned throughout our line (during the following night)—the only tribute we could then pay to the memory of our departed brethren, and the enemy so far respected our grief, as to allow us its unmolested indulgence. . . . The 1st of April was ushered in with the painful recollection, that many of our late gay and cheerful companions were lying at the foot of the breach unburied; and a flag of truce was consequently sent to the fort to entreat permission to remove and inter our dead. This was kindly and unconditionally accorded; and we then collected the disfigured and gory bodies, and buried them in the evening, with military honours; the enemy setting us a bright example of humanity, made not the smallest attempt to disturb us and we enjoyed a good night's rest, that of the preceding having been anything but refreshing'.

The complete failure of the British forces in this savage battle appeared to them perfectly inexplicable as the success of the insurgents in their defence of the breach seemed miraculous. Previous to the assault a grove of pikes alone presented to the glance of the assailants. The rebels appearing on any part of the wall were instantly shot, though quickly replaced by others. But it was in the immediate defence of the breach that the defenders wrought havoc on the hostile columns. From the wonderfully sheltered and concealed enclaves, they, keeping themselves hidden, wielded the pikes, eighteen to twenty feet long and as sharp as the razor, against the pressing aggressors. The British could never reach the rebels and could seldom imagine from whence the blow was struck. Behind the lines of the pike-men, the insurgents standing on an elevated spot kept up a heavy fire, while others posted on the bastions engaged the advancing troops in a deadly contest. The gallantry and devotion that endowed them with what they lacked in discipline and striking power, enabled them to repulse the successive assaults. Welsh declared: ' . . . the system of defence adopted by these savages would have done credit to any engineers. Nothing could surpass it but their unwearied perseverance'.⁶⁹ The attack having failed, the English instituted a blockade of the fort of Panjalamkurichi and waited for the arrival of reinforcements.

⁶⁹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 67-68.

Reverses in Dindigul

Though the insurgents held the English in check in the southernmost region, they failed in attaining a similar objective in Coimbatore and Dindigul. As the operations in Malabar turned the scales against the confederates by February 1801, the detachment of Lieutenant Colonel Innes left Airriakotta near Kozhikode on the 27th for the south. Advancing through Palakkad and Erode, the forces encamped at Palni on the 15th of March.⁷⁰ A *hircarrah*, whom Innes sent in advance to Dindigul, reported to him at Palni that the confederates believing that the Company had withdrawn its forces and having no idea when they would return, sent away their armed men to other regions. As surprise appeared imperative for a quick victory over the rebels, Innes by forced marches reached Virupakshi, the headquarters of the Dindigul League. On the 17th of March the detachment encamped before this defiant town. On the approach of the enemy the rebels in considerable number reassembled in the close jungles near the town but all were ill-equipped and ill-disciplined.⁷¹ Immediately the confederates sent a mission to the far South. It reached Panjalamkurichi, gathered the armed inhabitants of Coimbatore and Dindigul who were serving with the rebels of Tirunelveli, and returned.⁷²

After completing preparations for the offensive, Innes sent a summons to Gopala Nayak to surrender, but the latter ignored it. Thereupon he declared Gopala Nayak an enemy of the British *circar*.⁷³ Early in the morning of 21st March the detachment commenced a three-pronged operation against rebel posts at Cormandelli and Cowdelli. The insurgents led by Gopala Nayak, deserted their villages according to their preconcerted plan and took their position behind their barriers in the mountain ranges of Anamalai.⁷⁴ The chieftains of Mangalam, Periapatti, Chenchode, Jallipatti, Tondamattur and Somandorai with all the inhabitants of these districts thronged to the rebel cause.⁷⁵ The

⁷⁰ Madras Council, 22 December 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 5, p. 3455.

⁷¹ Ibid., 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3458-62.

⁷² Board of Revenue, July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 291, p. 8725.

⁷³ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3470.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 3476.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 3505.

towns in the valley passed under British control while the rebels took their stand in the hills.⁷⁶ The operations in Virupakshi continued from the 22nd to the 24th but the English found the lines of defence, as described by Innes, 'everywhere most astonishingly strong'.⁷⁷ After trying exertion the forces reached the northern and southern entrances to the hills of the western range in Virupakshi. Accompanied by 700 men, Gopala Nayak took his stand at Pachalur, the only stronghold left to him, but on the 27th March it too fell. In the course of their precipitate retreat the fugitives left a great part of their baggage, and a good number of their horses and elephants at Woddacaud.⁷⁸ After the fall of their barriers in Virupakshi the patriots headed by Gopala Nayak, his principal adviser Muthu Vira, and his former emissary in Dhoondaji Waug's court Tomachi Mudali, moved to Delli. Innes detached Major Leonard with a party of Malay Corps to Collumbum in a bid to cut off rebel retreat but without success.⁷⁹ The leaders of Delli, Mangalam, Periapatti, Chenchode, Jallipatti, Tondamattur and Somandorai received Gopala Nayak in the hills of Manali and escorted him to Delli. The peons and peasants deserted their villages, set them on fire and established themselves in the jungles for a desperate struggle.⁸⁰

After dislodging the rebels from Pachalur, Innes returned to Virupakshi on the 8th of April. After gathering information about rebel posts in the hills, he detached Lieutenant Frith in command of the King's Twelfth Infantry to Pollachi with orders to advance from thence to Marchenayakpalayam, then Anamalaikottai, and from there to penetrate to the hills running west of Dellikottai to make a diversion in that direction and to cut off the escape routes of the fugitives.⁸¹ Successful in these operations, Innes directed Yadul Nayak of Delli to attend on him on the 9th of April, but the rebel chief refused. In consequence he sent an ultimatum: 'You have still time to save yourself and family from ruins and disgrace by obedience. But by disobedience every mis-

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3476.

⁷⁷ Board of Revenue, 30 March 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 279, pp. 3598-9.

⁷⁸ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3476-80.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 3487-90.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 3504-5.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 3520-7.

fortune will attend you. Consider well before you make your choice. Every drop of blood that falls will be on your head'. A determined rebel as he was Yadul Nayak remained steadfast to the confederate cause.⁸² On the 9th the British detachment led by Innes advanced from Virupakshi and on the 12th morning reached Dellikottai. Determined to carry the war to the hills, he procured the best information he could obtain of the rebel concentrations. In the meantime Frith, who was sent to make a diversion at Anamalaikottai, threatened Delli from that quarter. On the 13th Innes, marching across four strong barriers in a close jungle, reached the foot of a hill where rebels had encamped. Led by Yadul Nayak, the confederates charged the enemy. A smart fire from a brass three-pounder and small pieces helped to counter-balance the firelocks of the enemy. However their endeavour proved unequal to the British striking power. After suffering serious losses in the subsequent encounters the insurgents withdrew to the interior of the extensive woods. The enemy followed up its victory with the occupation of Jallipatti and Tondamattur.⁸³

Anxious to terminate this difficult mountain war quickly, the invading forces decided to strike at the rebels in their strongholds on the hills. Commanded by Frith, the detachment began the arduous ascent to the summits, covered by the fire from a gun and howitzers posted below. The parties pushed on relentlessly, inclining to the left to turn to the right of a barrier but this leading them under a precipice, large stones were hurled on them and many were killed or wounded. The entire detachment regrouped itself under a cliff of rock, receiving and returning a sharp fire for a considerable time; but without being able to move out on account of the constant shower of stones. The British position, however, commanded the view of the barrier, where the rebels had planted a brass gun. A reconnaissance having been made, Innes detached an advance party of infantry and Malays under Lieutenant Hodgson with direction to carry the road leading to the barrier, which the latter did. Commanding a company of troops, Innes himself joined the advance party at the occupied barrier. A six-pounder was separated into pieces and carried up the hill and a barrier was cut through to make a passage. The thrust was now resumed.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 3541-7.

⁸³ Board of Revenue, 7 May 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 281, pp. 5523-4.

Receiving and returning a smart fire, yet pushing the insurgents from post to post, Hodgson gained the summit of the hill. An attacking party led by Major Pictor taking another route joined Innes. Driven to dismay by the surging forces of the enemy, the rebels took to flight in great confusion over the mountain ranges. The troops, much fatigued by this hazardous campaign and handicapped physically by the constant shower of stones and bullets, made no attempt to continue the pursuit.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3554-8.

CHAPTER IX

REBEL RETREAT AND COUNTER-OFFENSIVE: TIRUCHI PROCLAMATION

VICISSITUDES in the fortune of the patriotic forces marked the period that followed the Battle of Panjalamkurichi. Humbled in Tirunelveli, the enemy made a supreme effort in mobilising a formidable army against the rebels. A powerful offensive launched by it changed the tide of the struggle against the confederates. The insurgents evacuated their territories in the north and the extreme south and retreated to the woods of Sivaganga. The fate of the Rebellion appeared bleak but in this dark hour Marudu Pandyan, who had been directing the rebel operations, assumed the full command. The patriots again began to strike at the citadels of imperialism. In a wave of triumphant upsurge, they swept every obstacle before them, carrying the banner of revolt to Ramnad, Madurai and Thanjavur. Now the centre of gravity of the movement shifted from Coimbatore and Tirunelveli to the Madurai-Thanjavur region.

Evacuation of Dindigul

At 11.00 p.m. on the 12th of April 1801 and at 1.00 p.m. and again at 6.00 p.m. on the 13th, the British troops, posted on the other side of a river in Anamalai, heard reports of a gun to the eastward towards Delli. More shots were heard in the course of the night of the 13th in the same direction at the first cross road leading to Delli, five miles on the southern road towards the Anamalai Hills. The guides employed by the English, explained that they were the pre-arranged signals for the inhabitants to repair to the woods. On the 13th morning the armed ryots, who had assembled from the villages of Coimbatore and Dindigul, were seen pushing off towards the jungles with their families and cattle.¹ Several parties assembled on the barriers, which were already

¹ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3562-3.

built in the interior of the extensive forest, and erected new posts and formed themselves into columns for moving into the valley.²

Confronted with an imminent threat of rebel incursion, Innes planned a three-pronged offensive against their positions in the Anamalai Hills. He decided to lead his detachment to Jallipatti on the 19th of April and attack the barriers, that were raised at the entrance to the hills. Captain Whittle, taking the command of a body of Malays and other details, advanced on the same day through a different route to reach the rear of the barriers, already contemplated as Innes's target. The flanking party, led by Lieutenant Hodgson, pushed in another direction through the woods. The scheme of operations was so co-ordinated as to attack the rebel concentrations simultaneously from the east, north and west. All the passes being blocked up by the enemy, the insurgents found their escape, except to Travancore and Cochin, extremely arduous.³

All preparations being expedited for the final assault, the three assailant parties advanced through a close jungle for a distance of eight miles and on the 20th of April encamped at Attoor Padivu, at the bottom of the Anamalai Hills, where the rebels had taken their positions in the calcuts or stone barriers. Having refreshed themselves, the forces began the difficult ascent. To escape encirclement by the British detachments, the armed columns evacuated their barriers. Behind them they left matchlocks, other fire-arms and provisions in considerable quantity. Many of the rebels, overtaken by gloom and despondency moved to the interior of the hills. Attoor Padivu, the last stronghold held by the rebels in the Anamalai Hills, fell to the enemy. Innes promptly occupied more of the barriers and employed pioneers for their demolition⁴. The fugitives dispersed themselves in the woods but the hill fever had so terrific effect on them that it took a heavy toll of life. Among the leaders, who perished in the hills, were Yadul Nayak of Delli, Andiamma and Nagu Nayak of Periapatti. A few of the survivors fled to the plains.⁵

Having completed the entire destruction of the bastions, barriers, magazines and other strongholds made by the insurgents

² Ibid., p. 3576.

³ Ibid., pp. 3579-80.

⁴ Ibid., p. 3576.

⁵ Board of Revenue, June 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 286, p. 6607.

on the hills of Anamalai and Delli, the detachment of Innes returned to Dindigul. He stationed parties at Palni, Jallipatti, Delli and Virupakshi to prevent the recurrence of outbreaks.⁶ Gopala Nayak escaped to Anioornadu, taking shelter with Poni Tevar of Kallapatti. Upon his appearance in Anioornadu the peasants of Kariamattur, Ariapatti and Namnahoor had gathered in strength for further depredations. But Innes nipped the trouble in the bud. Soon after he received information of this rebel move, he sent an expedition under Nattar Khan. The troops attacked and dispersed the armed groups on the 4th of May and seized Gopala Nayak.⁷ Parties were sent and rewards were offered for the apprehension of the rebels of note. This resulted in the seizure of more leaders—Somandorai Gour of Somandorai, Naga Nayak of Periapatti, Tomachi Mudali and Somnath Sherogar.⁸ The Company granted liberal rewards in return for the services rendered by the traitors: 2,000 rupees for the capture of Gopala Nayak and 500 each for the rest.⁹ However the remnant of the broken bands, eluding the pursuit of the Company's troops, gathered together in the valley of Dindigul. They formed themselves into groups and, led by Muthu Vella Nayak (son of Gopala Nayak) and his associate Muthu Vira, made their course to the jungles of Sivaganga.¹⁰ A party of these fugitives was seen moving to the south through the vicinity of Madurai and joining the camp of Marudu.¹¹

Sevatiah's Appeal to Rajah Serfoji

In the far South the British forces continued the blockade of Panjalamkurichi. Failing to storm the fort and badly in need of supplies and reinforcements, the Company requisitioned the services of its allied princes. Serfoji, the Rajah of Thanjavur, readily consented to extend his full support. This ruler held possession of no territory except the fort of Thanjavur but his attitude of hostility to the nationalists seemed reprehensible. The patriots had

⁶ Madras Council, 22 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, pp. 3591-2.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 3589-90.

⁸ Ibid., p. 3586.

⁹ Ibid., p. 3596.

¹⁰ Board of Revenue, June 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 285, p. 6101.

¹¹ Madras Council, 16 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3280.

championed the cause of Thanjavur Raj in their rebellion, demanding the restoration of the kingdom to the Hindu royal house. They looked upon him as a person whose interests might naturally be expected to favour their exertions. When the prince, whose very cause, they had advocated, went to the aid of the enemy, it struck a note of gloom in the patriotic circles. Added to this the troops and provisions supplied by the prince contributed to the fighting power of the English.¹²

Greatly agitated at this attitude of Serfoji, Sevatiah, the rebel chief of Panjalamkurichi, despatched an urgent appeal to Thanjavur. Depicting the story of the struggle organised by Kattabomman and the escape of the rebels from Palayamkottai, it proceeded:

‘My brother carried on a war against the Europeans, but not being able to continue it, he took refuge in the territory of the Tondaiman, who treacherously delivered him up to the Europeans. If they had kept him in confinement, we would have found out means to release him, wherever he might have been confined. But they immediately hung him up and confined us in a dungeon at Palayamkottai. In this state I sought the favour of a European lady, who showed me kindness and preserved me. Some time later I represented to the lady, that being in prison I had no assistance to perform the ceremony for the dead and begged that she would procure me leave from her husband to perform those ceremonies, which I said I would perform in prison with the fetters on my feet. As soon as she had procured leave I sent to the country and under pretence of performing the ceremony I had 200 cooly loads of plantains, plantain-leaves and firewood brought, in which arms were concealed. The people, who brought the above articles, were permitted afterwards to pass. There were also people appointed to lie in wait within and without the fort round about. The people who were permitted to pass in the fort came there where I was, I gave them sign to attack the people who were with me who consisted of one guard of sepoys. My people attacked them, took their arms and carried me away with the fetters I had on my feet. My people killed also the gentleman and carried away his wife, a European lady. They killed also the people at the gates

¹² Madras Council, 16 August 1803, Political Consultations, Vol. 11, p. 1069.

and made their way out of the fort.¹³ Thereupon we marched in a body to Panjalamkurichi and fought with the people who were in the fort and took possession of it. I fortified the place and collected a body of 30,000 men and 30,000 of Vella Marudu's people, when this news was known the European troops and Malay troops which were here came to fight against me. The Europeans fought with me on the 10th of Tey (January-February) and suffered loss. Four gentlemen who were commanders of that army were taken alive and hanged by my order in order to revenge the murder of my brother and now I shall fight as long as I can. . . . The Europeans must either be totally destroyed, or if that cannot be done I shall fight till I can fight no longer and then put an end to my life I shall never suffer myself to be taken by them; all the chieftains in the country are joined together. We shall not fight with them openly, face to face, but attack them in the night, when they dress their victuals, and so as not to be observed by them. In this manner great numbers of them have been killed, and now the Europeans have no troops and they are encamped at a distance.¹⁴ If now the people in the different countries would rise up and resist they will sink and perish. As the people in the different countries are submissive, they desire them to do whatever they like. . . .

'Now it is the report that the troops of Rajahmanya Rajasri Maharajah Sahib, Rajah of Thanjavur, are in readiness. I rejoiced greatly in the hopes that in case I should not be able to hold out here, I would find protection with Maharajah who is my father. I have despised the Europeans and why should I not despise them? But now they say the Maharajah himself is sending troops. If Maharajah himself should send them assistance what must become of us? If they be not destroyed now, all will become theirs. Their army is gone to the westward, but nobody knows where it is at present, whether it is destroyed or whether it still exists. If the Maharajah will grant me encouragement, I shall be able to bring them down. But if your troops come I can do nothing. As I am your servant I have not taken any revenge on Tondaiman

¹³ The official accounts do not indicate that the rebels had killed any of its garrison. They state that the sentry and the guards were overpowered and disarmed.

¹⁴ It is obvious that the reference here is to the British forces, stationed for the blockade of the Fort of Panjalamkurichi.

on account of what he has done to my brother, otherwise I would have done it. If your troops are to come hither and if you will promise me protection I myself will come to you and you have been our father from the time of our ancestors. I will come under your refuge and you may deliver me up yourself'.¹⁵

However this patriotic urge of the rebel chief excited no sympathetic response. Serfoji continued his support to the Company. Dattaji Appah, the minister of the Rajah, to whom the letter was delivered, not only passed it on to the enemy but arrested the messenger and threw him into prison.¹⁶

The patriots had every reason to consider Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman, Rajah of Pudukkottai, as their deadly foe, for he conducted Kattabomman to the scaffold. Yet as his alliance was in the national interest, Sevathiah sent frequent messages directing him to join Marudu with all his heart and strength under threat of exemplary punishment. When this yielded no result, he required of the Tondaiman to observe at least strict neutrality, that he should neither give any succour nor permit the Company's troops to pass through his state. Yet the rebels could neither gain his support nor restrain him from extending his aid to the enemy.¹⁷

The Blockade of Panjalamkurichi

Though the patriots received no assistance from the princes, they faced the ordeal with coolness and courage. Sallying from their broken walls, they waged a continuous war in their bid to break through the cordon raised by the enemy. Waiting for the arrival of reinforcements, Macaulay, on the other hand, decided to hold his lines before the rebel citadel. He employed pioneers and lascars to erect shelters for the men on duty and formed a regular camp.

The 2nd of April passed in quiet. But at 8 o'clock in the evening, the rebels determined to keep the troops engaged, saluted them with a shower of bullets. It was remarkably dark; the enemy could not ascertain the strength of the attacking party, but when

¹⁵ Translation of a letter of Jagavira Rama Kattabomma Nayak, Military Consultations, 9 June 1801, Vol. 284, pp. 4292-8.

¹⁶ Madras Council, 9 July 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, p. 4289.

¹⁷ W. Blackburne, 20 May 1803, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 771-2.

the moon rose on the horizon it perceived a phalanx retiring to the fort. This marked the beginning of a long series of clashes. The days up to the 22nd of May were marked by rebel sallies, daily skirmishes in which a few men fell on both sides and British attempts to strengthen their outposts. Frequently, the defiant garrison sent cannon shots from some old guns, drawn out under the walls of the fort, to the British camp.

At noon on the 22nd of May a heavy thunderstorm, accompanied by wind and rain suddenly assailed the positions of the Company. As it was the most favourable moment, when fire-arms would be ineffective, for the much dreaded pike charge, the English troops began to fall in. In a twinkling the thunder was succeeded by the flash and sound of the Company's six-pounder on the most distant outpost and a strong column of insurgents dashed towards it. A squall approached beating on the warring parties and in its wake there appeared suddenly one thousand pike men, swarming over the ill-defended barriers. The wretched enemy, assailed by the fury of nature and the pike charge of the rebels, strove hard to give a fire, but hardly a musket would go off. The gun, after discharging once only, was found in the possession of the rebels. The armed parties, more intent on seizing the ordnance than harming the defenders of it, wounded only eight of them. They were pushing off with their prize as fast as the wet cotton-soil ground would permit, when a relief expedition appearing, the British troops succeeded in rescuing the cannon. As the rain ceased, the insurgents poured out a multitude equipped with fire-arms, but being confronted with similar party from the British camp, a general engagement ensued. After about an hour's fighting, both the groups retired with no great casualties on either side. In the night about 9 o'clock the troops of the Company were roused by another thunderstorm. They could discern faint flashes of fire arms through the gloom in the direction of their outposts. Now and then the report of a cannon added to the horrors of darkness experienced by the British camp. A general attack with pikes was anticipated in every part of the line but to its relief the weather soon cleared up.¹⁸

In the ruses and stratagems of war Oomathurai was much noted and dreaded. The period of blockade was marked by a

¹⁸ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 69-71.

series of daring exploits, designed and executed by him. One evening Potti Pakada and Gidivetti Nayak, disguised as mendicants and claiming as coming from Kasi, approached the British camp begging for alms. They entertained the weary troops by songs, dance and magic. The incantation worked, as it was expected. Greatly impressed, the spectators persuaded them to continue the thrilling performance. A drizzle came together with darkness. Taking full advantage, Oomathurai with fifty of his select men stealthily entered the camp and launched a murderous assault. After many of the soldiers were killed, the assailants made their escape.¹⁹ The adventures of this kind added to the fury of the struggle. The clashes and exchange of fire continued up to the 22nd of May, after which the situation took a decidedly more violent turn.

The Second Battle of Panjalamkurichi

About the 20th of May the despondent Macaulay received information of the approach of a relief expedition. At the orders of Edward Clive, detachments from Fort St George, St Thomas' Mount, Malabar, Arcot, Dindigul and Tiruchirapalli poured into the southernmost province. A grand army assembled at Kovilpatti. Lieutenant Colonel Agnew, the Adjutant General, reputed for his gallantry and local knowledge, was directed to command the operations.²⁰ On the 21st the forces of Agnew encamped at Panjalamkurichi. The next day the King's Seventy-Seventh Regiment, led by Lieutenant Colonel Spry, a company of artillery under Captain Sir John Sinclair and three companies of the First Battalion of the Thirteenth Regiment under Captain Townsend joined the camp. Subsequently the First Regiment of Light Cavalry under Captain J. Doveton and the Malay Corps under Captain Whitley reinforced the enemy.²¹

On the 23rd of May 1801 this formidable army moved on the defiant citadel. The fifty-three day old blockade ended; the siege began. The batteries, mounted on an elevated place, commenced a devastating fire against the bastion of the south-west angle of

¹⁹ Madana Singa Nayak, Panjalamkurichi Azhivu Charithira Kummi, palm leaves, Nos. 182-5.

²⁰ Madras Council, 15 October 1801, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 31, p. 157.

²¹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 73-4.

the fort and continued working throughout the night. On the 24th when a wide breach had been effected, Agnew gave the signal for advance. Powerful columns, covered by the heavy fire from the big guns and supported by the field pieces, steadily moved in strength to the breach. To the astonishment of the assailants, notwithstanding this formidable array—with the entire army ready to go into action in support of the advance columns, the gallant patriots commanded by Oomathurai decided to fight out the issue and threw themselves into a deadly fray. Equipped with muskets and pikes, they swarmed against the besieging forces. Thronging on the mud works, parties kept up a galling fire on the storming detachments, while a phalanx, animated with vigour sallied forth from the broken bastions, engaging the assailants in grim hand to hand fighting. In the dreadful carnage that followed both the parties suffered grievously. Eventually fire-power triumphed over sheer gallantry. Despite the heavy toll of life taken by the deadly fire, the rebels continued their fierce resistance till the last of all those who gathered on the breach, fell. The British forces surmounted the breach and stormed the fort with a loss of 600 troops.

Shortly after the fatal moment the survivors in the rebel garrison, 3,000 in number, who included many women and children, assembled on the eastern face of the fallen fort. All rushed swiftly in eastern and northern directions. 'No sooner had they got clear of the fort, than they formed into two solid columns, and thus retreated, beset but not dismayed'.²² They moved rapidly towards Sivaganga. The British cavalry, supported by the sepoys of Ettayapuram and Pudukkottai, chased and charged the fleeing columns. They attacked the parties in their flank and rear and cut down 600 in a series of engagements. The forces which took possession of the fort found the bodies of 450 insurgents lying littered about.

A total of 1,050 patriots died in the battle of Panjalamkurichi within the breach and outside the walls. Away from the east face of the fort the bodies of rebels who were killed in former actions were found disposed.²³ Numerous armed men, taken as prisoners,

²² Ibid., p. 76.

²³ Madras Council, 2 and 9 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, pp. 4220-9 and 4283.

were beheaded near the fort on the 24th of May, at the orders of Agnew. On charges of carrying arms and supplying grain to rebels, ten more inhabitants were executed.²⁴ So terrible indeed was the disaster that it badly shattered the rebel power of resistance in Tirunelveli.

The fall of the stronghold rendered the rebel position very vulnerable. Soon after the dismal tidings reached them, the patriots quitted their barriers which they had erected with laborious effort on the Valnad Hills and abandoned Tutukudi, Kadalgudi and several other posts. Their plan to storm Tirunelveli too fell through. The great body of the insurgents, divided into small groups, moved to the north and joined their confederates of Ramnad and Sivaganga.²⁵ The rest, hunted by the British forces, fled to the different villages and the hills of the south and west.²⁶

Marudu's Reception of Oomathurai

The cavalry of the enemy in pursuit of the fleeing rebels engaged them in more battles. One of the insurgent parties took its stand near a village and fought a pitched battle but was routed. Most of this group fell wounded and dead. In the evening of the day of battle, induced by the sullen quiet that followed the carnage, the women of the village hurried to the blood-stained field. Eager to afford relief and succour, they made a close search for the persons in whom the life might not have become extinct. Among the heaps of the slaughtered they discovered the son of one of them still breathing. Struck by agony, they gently raised his head. To their dismay the afflicted young man rallied the energy that still remained at his command, and whispered into the ears of his mother: 'Oh mother let me die, but try to save the life of Swamy who lies near me'—'swamy' denoting Oomee. Rising to the melancholy occasion, the mother hurried to comply with the wishes of the dying son. Soon the women discovered Oomathurai weltering in his blood but alive. With the same motherly tenderness, they quickly lifted him and carried him off to their village. They dressed his wounds and attended on him with solicitude but were

²⁴ Ibid., 2 June 1801, Ibid., Vol. 284, p. 4043 and Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 135-6.

²⁵ Ibid., 2 June 1801, Ibid., Vol. 284, pp. 4040-1.

²⁶ H. R. Pate (ed.), *Tinnevelly District Gazetteer*, Vol. 1 (1917).

greatly scared at the sudden appearance of the sepoy of Ettayapuram, chasing the rebel bands. At this critical moment an ingenious device dawned in their minds. They covered Oomathurai with a piece of cloth and set up a shriek of lamentation. On the approach of the enemy's troops, they told them that just then a young man died of smallpox. The traitors, taken by panic, suddenly fled, without casting a glance behind.²⁷

Oomathurai had been afflicted with six desperate wounds. Yet on the third day it seemed certain that he was out of danger. On the 28th of May with his wounds still unhealed, he reached Kumudi. Marudu Pandyan accompanied by a large crowd of people, reached Kumudi and affectionately welcomed into his camp the hero who returned from the fallen. Taking Oomathurai to his headquarters at Siruvayal, he attended on him with the greatest care. The villagers even from the remote places visited their gallant leader and gave him presents. The women of the town collected sundry articles, distributed them among the poor, and made offerings to the deities for the quick recovery of the afflicted rebel.²⁸

Agnew's Declaration

The patriots fleeing from the south and north made the jungle of Kalayarkoil their rallying centre. More of the inhabitants of Sivaganga and Ramnad joining the insurrection swelled the rebel ranks. The preparations made in the woods and the movements of armed groups portended the possibility of a major offensive against the British positions. Concerned at these, the Company directed its army to take the field against the rebel concentrations in the forests of Sivaganga. However, as the odds appeared heavy, Agnew, who commanded the operations, sought the aid of the princes and to sow the seeds of discord in the rebel ranks. At his request the Rajahs of Travancore and Pudukkottai and the Poligar of Ettayapuram sent more of their troops to reinforce the Company's army, furnished provisions and transmitted intelligence gathered by their *hircarrahs*.²⁹ On the 12th of June he issued a proclama-

²⁷ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 132-3.

²⁸ Madras Council, July 1801, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 285, pp. 5051-2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 October 1801, *Military Despatches to England*, Vol. 31, pp. 153-5.

tion, warning the inhabitants of Sivaganga of the dreadful consequences of resistance. Calculated to undermine the popular image of Marudu Pandyan, to persuade his brother Vella Marudu to betray the rebel cause and to encourage rival claims to the throne of Sivaganga, he announced:

'Whereas Chinna Murdoo (Marudu), the Sherogar of Sivaganga, unmindful of his duty to the Company's Sirkar and their repeated and positive orders has not only assisted the rebels of Panjalamcourchy (Panjalamkurichi) with men and ammunition, and given protection to the rebels of Veerapatchy (Virupakshi) but levied war against the Company by attacking their forts, murdering their servants and subjects and plundering their territories.

'It is known to the inhabitants of Sivaganga and to the whole world the complete protection and comfort they have enjoyed ever since they were placed under the Company's Government and the security and indulgence that has been extended to Chinna Murdoo as the servant of the Heiress³⁰—notwithstanding his crimes prior to that period.³¹ It is also fully known to them that this rebel Chinna Murdoo was sent a few years past a slave in the family of their former Rajah Muthu Wadaganaud Tevar.³² Having obtained the confidence of the Rany on the death of the Rajah he has long exercised a severe and improper sway in the country,³³ and now that the Heiress (in what manner she died has not yet been ascertained) he has filled up the measure of his crimes by taking up arms with a view to usurp the rights of the lawful heir of Sivaganga.³⁴

'The English Sirkar justly incensed at such flagrant conduct

³⁰ In 1780 Marudu became the minister of princess Vellachi, the daughter of Rajah Udaya Tevar.

³¹ In 1780 Marudu organised a rebellion against the British and Nawab's occupation forces of Sivaganga and expelled them. Naturally the Company considered it a serious crime, though it was a service to liberty.

³² Marudu began his career as betel bearer in the service of Rajah Muthu Vaduganatha Tevar (Udaya Tevar) of Sivaganga.

³³ Agnew depicted the administration of Marudu as severe and improper in his bid to malign the foe of the Company. James Welsh in his *Military Reminiscences* had declared that Marudu was the popular leader of the people of Sivaganga.

³⁴ Through a total distortion of facts Agnew sought to attribute an entirely different motive to the rebellion and to excite suspicion among the people against their leader.

has sent Colonel Agnew with an Army to punish the Rebel Chinna Murdoo and the supporters of his rebellion but with instructions to protect those who adhere to the Company's Sirkar and the interests of the lawful heir of Sivaganga whosoever that may be. The persons who consider themselves entitled thereto are therefore required to repair without delay to Colonel Agnew's camp where they will receive the fullest protection and they may rely on their claims being impartially investigated and the person who shall appear justly entitled to it shall be placed on the *puttom* (throne) as soon as the rebels shall have suffered the punishment due to their crimes.

'Colonel Agnew considers it his duty to warn all those who may consider they have a claim to the *Puttom* of Sivaganga that such claims will be forfeited for ever if instead of repairing to his camp they join the Rebel Chinna Murdoo or his party.

'Colonel Agnew has been given to understand that Vella Murdoo, the brother of the rebel Chinna Murdoo, disapproves his brother's wicked conduct—Colonel Agnew though determined to punish the guilty, is anxious to save the innocent-humanity—therefore prompts him to offer Vella Murdoo and his family protection if he will repair to his camp from whence he will give his safe conduct to Madura there to remain in quiet.

'Having thus explained to the inhabitants of Sivaganga the motives of the English Sirkar for sending an army into their country he now warns them of the dreadful consequence that must inevitable result from their attempting to oppose the Company's arms and the interests of the lawful heir to the *puttom* by adhering to and fighting for the rebellious Chinna Murdoo, the usurper of his rights.

'The awful example before them of the recent fate of the rebels of Panjalamcourchy (Panjalamkurichi), Veerapatchy (Virupakshi) and Dally (Delli), they cannot be ignorant of—such will be the dreadful punishment of the inhabitants of Sivaganga if they too oppose the Company's troops and of all who fight against them'.³⁵

Rebel Counter-Offensive

Intimidation and concentration of military might on Sivaganga did not deter the insurgents from their firm resolve to con-

³⁵ Agnew, 12 June 1801, Proclamation, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 421-4.

tinue the struggle. Elaborate preparations already carried into effect enabled Marudu Pandyan to co-ordinate the offensive operations. Large quantities of grain and fire-arms had already been deposited in the jungles of Ramamangalamkottai within four miles of Kalayarkoil. More stores had been established at Kalayarkoil, Kadalgudi and Kallarkudi. Even before March 1801 the rebels gathered the fire-arms, repaired them and completed preparations in their woods for the most obstinate war. Confident of meeting their needs of grain from their stores, they laid waste the entire country in their endeavour to harass the advancing forces and to deprive them of supplies.³⁶

In May 1801 the insurgents who retreated to the jungles of Sivaganga from the different provinces, reinforced by more bodies of armed inhabitants, launched a desperate offensive. They stormed the British strongholds and made deep inroads in the territories controlled by the enemy. In the course of the initial wave of attacks the pillaging parties vanquished the forces of the Company and its ally, the Nawab of the Carnatic, in the battles fought at Tirupatore and Nattam.³⁷ They stormed Tirmvelur and Melur, captured the fire-arms and ammunition deposited therein and got themselves better equipped. In Verapur, Bomma Nayak headed the rebellion and expelled the servants of the Company, who were engaged in the collection of revenue.³⁸ From here the insurgents advanced towards Madurai. Commanded by Oomathurai, a column of armed men liberated Palaynad. In July the Kallar tribes of Anioornadu defied the Company's authority and liberated the western region of Madurai. Exuberant at these victories the veterans advanced to Madurai to assault the fort, but finding the British garrison well entrenched, they directed their course to Kadarakoil and took possession of it.³⁹ After the occupation of Nattam, the pillaging parties made an attempt to make incursions into the district of Tiruchirapalli but were thwarted by Captain Blair. Subsequently, they posted a strong guard at the Convoypatti Pass

³⁶ Amildar of Palamaneri, 23 March 1801, letter to Lushington, translation, Tinnevely Collectorate Records, No. 3579, p. 85.

³⁷ Madras Council, 26 May 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 283, p. 3820 and 1 June 1801, Vol. 284, p. 3870.

³⁸ Ibid., 7 July 1801, Ibid., Vol. 285, pp. 5047-8.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 5051-2.

to safeguard their newly-acquired possessions.⁴⁰ Raghunatha Tondaiman, Rajah of Pudukkottai reported to Governor Clive: At present Chinna Marudu, confederated himself with Sevathiah, is exciting disturbances. Having occupied the forts of Tirmvelur, Melur and Nattam, he has plundered the military stores, guns and fire locks of the Company and sent parties to Ramnad. 'The flame of rebellion is warm on every side'.⁴¹

In Ramnad the patriots scored more victories. The armed columns which arrived from Tirunelveli upon their discomfiture at Panjalamkurichi, infested Palameri (Palamaneri) and administered a severe blow to the British force stationed at this post. They followed up this victory by a siege of the fort of Tiruchuzhi, which surrendered on the 16th of July.⁴² After consolidating these gains, the rebels formed themselves into two columns for further assaults: one party, headed by Melappan, moved to the southern region of Ramnad while the other, commanded by Puttur, marched to the northern border. Their co-ordinated operations resulted in the liberation of most of Ramnad from the British rule. The administration of the Company took refuge in the fort of Ramnad.⁴³ The possession of this territory not only added to the strength of the rebels but gave them control of the entire coast. Afflicted by the famine conditions created by the British embargo on imports, more inhabitants appeared ready to join the struggle. The command of the coastal waters enabled them to obtain uninterrupted supplies of grain and war equipment, brought in by the doneys from the port of Tondi.⁴⁴

From Ramnad the rebellion swept over Thanjavur where the insurgents gained striking victories over the British arms. The possession of this fertile delta appeared a paramount necessity for the success of the rebellion. The people groaning under the

⁴⁰ Madras Council, 1 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, pp. 3870-1.

⁴¹ Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman, letter to Clive, trans., Military Consultations, 7 July 1801, Vol. 285, pp. 5047-8.

⁴² Madras Council, 4 August 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 286, pp. 5352 and 5366.

⁴³ Ibid., 21 June 1801, Ibid., Vol. 285, p. 4603 and 20 October 1801, Vol. 288, p. 6934.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20 October 1801, Ibid., Vol. 288, p. 6857.

Company's control rallied to the cause of the insurrection. Added to this, the control of this rich territory promised the possibility of a steady inflow of grain to the rebel-held territories. In July, on the advance of a body of rebels led by Shevata Tambi from the south to the borders of Thanjavur, the inhabitants, led by Gnana-muthu, rose in arms.⁴⁵ There followed spontaneous outbreaks. The patriots liberated Pattukkottai *Subah* and consolidated their strength with the establishment of their posts at Arandangi and Adiarkudi. In July the advance column of swarming crowds infested Mangudi. The combined forces of the Company and of the Rajah of Thanjavur, led by Blackburne checked the rebel progress and dispersed the armed groups in a battle fought at Mangudi. However the insurgents, determined as they were, regrouped, launched a fierce counter attack, and reoccupied the place.⁴⁶ A party of the rebels moved along the coast to Nagore, the emporium of foreign trade in the Peninsula.⁴⁷ As no alternative could be found in deterring the inhabitants from joining the rebels, Charles Harris, Collector of Kumbakonam warned: 'Those who thus surrender their pride (by joining the rebels) as subjects of the Company, are never again to expect to enjoy the happiness of the Company's protection but shall be punished'. Under threat of banishment he directed the merchants of Thanjavur to purchase no grain from the people in arms.⁴⁸ But the rebellion spread to more regions. Armed columns assembled at Shiali, Wodayar-palayam and Arialur and drove off the revenue servants of the Company.⁴⁹ A party threatened Kumbakonam and Collector Harris himself fled for safety.⁵⁰ The rebels now invested the fort of Kaveri in an attempt to seize a large quantity of grain stored in it, but were forced to abandon the siege on the arrival of a British relief expedition.⁵¹ Thereupon they made their course northward, crossed the River Kollidam, and took possession of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4 August 1801, Ibid., Vol. 286, pp. 5332 and 5390.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 5380-9.

⁴⁷ Madras Council, 11 August 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 286, p. 5643.

⁴⁸ Board of Revenue, July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 290, p. 8024.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3 August 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 292, p. 9112.

⁵⁰ Ibid., July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 291, p. 8269.

⁵¹ Board of Revenue, 1801, Report to Madras Council, Vol. 3, p. 100.

northern bank.⁵² In July the confederates were on the offensive everywhere. On the 9th Agnew reported to Madras that the principal body of the rebels were attacking the detachment of Innes in the west, two columns were pillaging Ramnad, and a fourth division was swarming the coast of Thanjavur.⁵³

The spectacular stride made by the patriots and formidable proportions that the movement assumed after a period of apparent setback took the English by complete surprise. The Company found itself quite unprepared to undertake a major campaign, needed to rehabilitate its fortune from the low ebb to which it had sunk. The attitude of the sepoys and the public servants added to its predicament. The native troops appeared reluctant to fight for the alien power against the patriots, evidently because of their nationalist sentiments and a paralysing sense of inferiority that their reverses engendered. The servants of the Nawab of the Carnatic not only refused their co-operation to the enemy but extended their support to the insurgents and spearheaded the movement in different regions. Edward Clive, the Governor of Madras, therefore, concluded that it was essential to increase the European proportion in the British army before major operations could be undertaken.⁵⁴ The success of the rebels in cutting British communication through the sea with the southern coast added to the odds against the Company. So firm was their control of the coast that it was compelled to divert supplies to Ceylon.⁵⁵

The patriots took full advantage of the gains that they wrested from the powerful enemy. They organised their administration in the liberated territories and revived the working of the liberal traditions instituted by the regimes of the past. *Monegars* were appointed for the administration of revenue. Public servants were posted in the villages for the promotion of rebel interests. Assistance was extended to the village communities for the resumption of

⁵² Ibid., 3 August 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 292, p. 9112.

Greatly concerned at the Confederate gains at Kollidam the Board of Revenue reported to Madras Council: 'Much of this destructive warfare is to be deplored, we hope, that out of it will grow the permanent tranquillity and prosperity of the country . . .' (Report of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 3, p. 100).

⁵³ Revenue Sundries, 9 July 1801, Vol. 26, p. 628.

⁵⁴ Madras Council, 7 July 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, p. 5055.

⁵⁵ Agnew, 19 June 1801, letter to Colonel Bartnett, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, p. 165.

their normal functions. Monetary grants were made to the religious institutions for the performance of ceremonies. In fact the administration was so organised as to respect the aspirations cherished by the masses and to promote the ideals of the revolution.⁵⁶

Marudu Pandyan's Proclamation

On the 16th of June 1801 the British administration received report of a rebel proclamation. Issued under the name of Marudu Pandyan, a copy of it was found on the wall of the large open gateway leading to the Nawab's palace in the Fort of Tiruchirapalli. It was addressed to the people of South India, mentioned in it as the Peninsula of Jambu Dweepa. Another was found on the wall of the great Temple of Srirangam. It was addressed to all the inhabitants of India, referred in it as the Island of Jambu.⁵⁷

The selection of Tiruchirapalli and Srirangam as the venues of the proclamation was of significance under the prevalent circumstances. These two places, like Coimbatore, lay within the sphere of rebel influence. Tiruchirapalli was a centre of political activity, for it was the control of this strategic fort that enabled the English to turn the tide of their long struggle against Chanda Sahib and the French in their favour and to consolidate their power in the South. Srirangam, as a Hindu spiritual centre, appeared as a suitable place for the issue of an appeal to all the people of the entire sub-continent. Addressed by the principal architect of the Peninsular Confederacy, it reflected the ideals of nationalism which moulded and promoted the awakening of the people against the alien regime. Announced in an hour of trial it represented an attempt not only to instil confidence in the people in their great struggle but to gain the co-operation of the entire population.

Unsurpassed by any similar declaration in the annals of India's freedom struggle, the Tiruchirapalli Proclamation constitutes a remarkable document. It enshrines in itself a unique combination of ideals and data, as presented by a great patriot, hailing from the masses. An all-Indian concept inspired the proclamation, for it not only made a direct appeal to the entire country but expressed an anxiety that if the political malady persisted, the entire

⁵⁶ Board of Revenue, July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 290, pp. 8022-3.

⁵⁷ Revenue Sundries, 10 July 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 445-6.

India would fall under alien rule. A high sense of nationalism guided the entire conception. It exhorted all religious and communal sections, whether they were peasants, sepoys or civil servants, to rally to the patriotic cause. However the details are more of South Indian interest as the rebels had no definite knowledge of the political developments in the North-east, and the English had not yet established their sway in the North. It indicted Mohammad Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic, for his folly in his dealings with the Company, the inhabitants for their indifference and the English for their duplicity and arrogance. The advocacy of the hereditary rights of the princes and national customs made in the proclamation, would appear ill-conceived in the light of modern concepts of liberalism, but it could not be denied that it seemed a necessity for securing popular support during a period when tradition swayed the imagination of the people. The English version of the two proclamations which are almost identical in their contents proceeds thus:

'Who ever sees this paper, Read it with Attention.

'To the castes, nations, Brahmins, Kshetriyas, Vysyas, Sudras and Musselmen that are in the Island of Jamboo/in the Peninsula of Jamboo Dweepa/this notice is given.

'His Highness the Nawab Mohammad Ali having foolishly given the Europeans place amongst you is become like a widow. The Europeans violating their faith have deceitfully made the Kingdom their own and considering the inhabitants as dogs, accordingly exercise authority over them. There existing no unity and friendship amongst you the above castes, who, not being aware of the duplicity of these Europeans—have not only inconsiderately calumniated each other, but have absolutely surrendered the Kingdom to them. In these countries now governed by these low wretches, the Inhabitants have become poor and the rice has become vellum (water).⁵⁸ And although they manifestly suffer, they are still without understanding to discern it. It is certain that the Man must die—although he may live a thousand years! And it is as certain that his fame will survive him as long as the Sun

⁵⁸ The proclamation indicates the great change that came in consequence of the British exploitation of the resources of the land. In the past the inhabitants could eat rice but after the establishment of British power they had to content with mere rice-water.

and Moon (shine). Therefore it is devised and determined that in future each shall enjoy his hereditary Rights, namely to His Highness the Nawab Arcot Subah, Vijaya Ramanah Tirumala Nayak the Carnatic, Tanjore the first place and to others their respective kingdoms⁵⁹ all to be given to their rightful sovereigns, without any violation of faith and national customs. (The Europeans must) confine themselves to a dependent service on the Nawab from which they may expect to derive a real and uninterrupted happiness. As the authority of the Europeans will be destroyed, we shall enjoy as in the service of the Nawab, constant happiness without tears.

‘It is therefore recommended that every man in his place and palayam fly to arms and unite together in order to make even the name of the low wretches cease. Then all the poor and the needy will get subsistence. But should there be any who, like dogs desirous of an easy life, obey the commands of these low wretches, such should be Karoo or cut off. As all know with what subtilty these low wretches, always in unity with each other have subdued the country! Therefore you Brahmins, Kshetriyas, Vysyas, Sudras and Musselmen, all who wear whiskers, whether civil or military, serving in the field or elsewhere, and you subedars, jamedars, havildars, nayaks and sepoyes in the service of the low wretches and all capable of bearing arms, let them in the first place display their bravery as follows:

‘Wherever you find any of the low wretches destroy them and continue to do so until they are extirpated. Whoever serves the low wretches will never enjoy eternal bliss after death, I know this. Consider and deliberate on it. And he who does not subscribe to this may his whiskers be like the hair of my secret parts and his food be tasteless and without nourishment and may his wife and children belong to another and be considered as the offspring of the low wretches to whom he had prostituted her.⁶⁰ Therefore

⁵⁹ The confederates had decided to restore the kingdoms to their princes. In the South, Arcot Subah, situated between the rivers Gundalakamma and Vellar, was to be returned to the direct rule of the Nawab; Thanjavur to prince Serfoji who was deprived of it in 1799; Madurai to Vijaya Ramana Tirumala Nayak, a descendant of Queen Minakshi; and the various other states, occupied or controlled by the English, to the direct authority of their respective princes.

⁶⁰ It might appear strange that the rebels at times used unrefined language. But what is to be remembered is that they belonged to the ranks of the common

all but whose blood is not contaminated by Europeans will begin to unite. Whoever reads this or hears of its contents let him make it as public as possible by writing it to his friends who in like manner must publish it to theirs. Every one who shall not write it and circulate it as before mentioned, let him be held as guilty of the enormous crime of having killed a black cow on the banks of the Ganga and suffer all the various punishments of hell. The Musselmen who do not conform to this, let him be considered as having drunk the blood of a pig.

'Whoever takes this off the wall where it is pasted let him be held as guilty of the five greatest sins.⁶¹ Let everyone read and take a copy of this address. Thus Marudu Pandyan, the servant of the great rajahs but the implacable Enemy of the European low wretches.

'To all living at Srirangam, the priests and great people, Marudu Pandyan prostrates himself at their feet. The sovereigns made and kept forts, mud bastions, churches and chapels. The above great Rajahs and People by the injustice of the low wretches are now reduced to poverty. So great a people as you are reduced to this State! Grant me your Blessing'.⁶²

people and that the words they used were in condemnation of the people who remained indifferent to the cause of rebellion or turned traitors.

⁶¹ The five greatest sins are: the killing of a Brahmin, adultery with the wife of the master, drinking of liquor, theft of gold, and finally, connivance at doing any of these offences. While expiation can be had during the present life for ordinary sins, it cannot be had for the five greatest sins, for their effect will continue even after rebirth, according to Hindu belief.

⁶² Revenue Sundries, 10 July 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 447-455.

CHAPTER X

TO THE END OF WAR

BY BRILLIANT daring and enterprise the rebels expelled the enemy from extensive regions of Ramnad, Madurai, Kallarnadu and Thanjavur. They organised their administration in the liberated territories, sought to consolidate their gains and to translate into practice their political ideals. Before long, however, they faced overwhelming opposition from the enemy. Determined to regain the initiative, the English rushed in powerful detachments from other provinces and pressed into action more troops of its allies. In the desperate struggle that followed ill-equipped crowds faced well-armed forces. The patriots found the odds so unsurmountable that they could no longer sustain the forces of liberty.

Three-Pronged Offensive

Agnew, who assumed the command of the operations against the extensive insurrection, formulated a forward strategy aimed at the defence of Madurai against the threat of rebel assault, retention of the control of key posts and an offensive in three directions—one from the south-east from Tirunelveli, another from the north-west from Dindigul and the third from the north-east from Thanjavur to the rebel-held territories. After the attainment of these objectives, he decided on a thrust against the insurgent concentrations in the jungles of Kalayarkoil.

The immediate task that faced the British army, was to relieve Madurai, threatened by the rebel columns. Having occupied Tirupatore and defeated the British forces stationed at Tiruppuvanam and Tiruchuzhi, the patriots directed an attack on Pandalgudi, which commanded the route to Madurai. As no reinforcements could be sent to the besieged posts, Agnew directed Major Gray, who commanded the garrison at Pandalgudi: 'This rebellion may render your position at Pandalgudi hazardous; you will therefore move to Naglapore (Nagalapuram), occupy the post. Maintain the post at Kolarpatti in order to interrupt rebel communication with Madurai'.¹ On the 28th of May Agnew himself

¹ Agnew, 21 May 1801, letter to Gray, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, p. 133.

led his detachment to Nagalapuram. When the rebels evacuated Kadalgudi with the fall of Panjalamkurichi, Major Sheppard occupied it and rebuilt its defences. Now a large body of insurgents consisting of the peasants of Tirunelveli and Sivaganga besieged Komeri. As the possession of this fort was of consequence to check the rebel infiltration to Madurai, Major Gray and Major Sheppard advanced against them and dispersed them in a sharp engagement.²

With the attainment of these immediate aims, Agnew embarked upon a difficult campaign through Ramnad. He occupied Palamaneri, from where he directed his course to the north. Experiencing considerable resistance, the detachment reached Tiruppuvanam, situated east of Madurai. This successful march through the rebel controlled territory greatly relieved the rebel pressure on the city of Madurai. Agnew sent a body of troops, led by Major James Graham, to reinforce the garrison at Madurai, but the patriots in great force fell upon the advancing party. A relief expedition, commanded by Major Sheppard, moved to the rescue of Graham, upon which the attacking parties withdrew to the jungles.³

From Tiruppuvanam the British army turned to the south-east, contemplating upon a move to Ramnad. The odds involved in this operation were great, for the nature of the country appeared quite unfavourable and concentration of rebel power seemed considerable. On the 7th of June, Agnew moved to Tiruppachetty, from where he advanced to Manamadurai. Marching along the bank of River Palamaneri, the enemy occupied Paramagudi on the 11th. The insurgents hovered around the British army throughout its march from Tiruppuvanam to Paramagudi. The terrain being favourable, they effectively utilised the advantage for harassing the enemy. On the 7th of June at Tiruppachetty the rebels posted individually and in small parties kept up a distant but galling fire on a body of troops that was detached to cover the flank of the line. The scattered disposition of the rebel parties together with the nature of the ground prevented the Company's troops from returning the fire successfully. Tormented greatly,

² Revenue Sundries, 29 May 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 557-9.

³ Madras Council, 9 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 284, pp. 4280-1.

Agnew sent regular infantry against the armed column, but the latter retreated with such rapidity as to defy pursuit. Deriving confidence in their tactics and benefited by the favourable nature of the country, the armed crowds again pressed vigorously on the rear-guard of the detachment. On reaching a convenient spot the cavalry, supported by a party of infantry and a field piece, moved against the insurgents. But the rebels by a daring counter-attack separated a body of troops from the principal detachment which could not regain the broken ground that it had originally occupied, and cut it to pieces. They followed up this success by disputing the ground that was found requisite for occupation by the piquets and in a series of engagements inflicted more losses upon the enemy. On the succeeding day the extreme closeness of the jungles gave them more opportunities but they preserved a respectable distance, firing only a few random shots. After reaching Manamadurai, the detachment resumed its tedious march on the 10th. Now strong parties of rebels, equipped with fire-arms, lined themselves behind high banks, water courses and jungles on the opposite bank of River Palamaneri. Major Sheppard led a body of troops against the attacking crowds, while the flanking parties reached the opposite bank of the river. However the rebels appeared so unusually numerous that the detachment was compelled to withdraw. The retreat was effected in good order but the rear-guard, returning too soon and neglecting to occupy a strategic position in a village nearby, was closely engaged. The enemy lost many of its troops; they were shot or piked to death. Emboldened, the rebels made a gallant dash across the river and vigorously attacked the forces with pikes. In a grim contest that ensued both the sides suffered heavy casualty. Constantly harassed, the detachments of Agnew by forced marches reached the village of Gangaikondan on the 12th of June. Two days later the enemy reached to the protection of the heavy batteries on the ramparts of Ramnad.⁴

The troops sent by the Company and its allied princes reinforced the badly mauled army. As a decisive superiority over the rebels was deemed essential for the effective prosecution of the war, the flank companies of the King's Regiment were rushed to Tarangambadi and the second battalion of the Twelfth Native Regiment to

⁴ Ibid., 21 June 1801, Ibid., Vol. 285, pp. 4550-3 and 4603-4 and Revenue Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 581-8.

Tiruchirapalli.⁵ More troops, sent by Velu Thampi from Travancore encamped at Tirunelveli.⁶ In response to an urgent message from Lushington, Governor North sent a detachment from Ceylon.⁷ The Tondaiman was found in panic at the threat of a rebel invasion of his state, but persuaded by Blackburne, he sent more of his troops and provisions.⁸ On the 22nd of June Agnew encamped at Kumudi, a strong and compact stone fort, and strengthened its garrison. Advancing through Palamaneri the expedition reached Madurai on the 9th of July. The rebels, engaged in conflicts with the detachment of Innes marching from Dindigul in the meantime, found it beyond their means to attempt check the progress of this expedition from Ramnad. Agnew spent the succeeding weeks at Madurai, dispersing the rebel concentrations and consolidating his position. Subsequently, he led his army to Tirupatore and took it by storm on the 24th of July. Here he waited for making a junction with the forces of Innes before beginning the more arduous campaign in the jungles of Kalayarkoil.

The patriots strove hard to check the British expedition from the north-west to Madurai. Reaching Nattam on the 13th of June, Innes received reinforcements from Pudukkottai.⁹ On the 4th of July the forces moved towards Manapacherri, situated eight miles away from Piranmalai. Innes decided to attack Piranmalai, a stone fort of considerable extent and elevation, embracing the declivity of a rocky projection and well manned by the rebels,¹⁰ but Agnew cautioned him against any rash venture, as the probability of success in his judgment did not strongly overbalance the risk of defeat. The assailants reconnoitered the rebel stronghold but judging their strength quite inadequate, did not take a chance.

⁵ Madras Council, 26 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, p. 4597.

⁶ Ibid., 27 June 1801, Ibid., Vol. 285, p. 4773.

⁷ Edward Clive, however, warned Lushington 'against the danger of giving impression relative to the commotion calculated to excite alarm and dissidence in the power of the British Government'. (Report of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 3, p. 97). This indicates the deliberate attempt made by the administration to suppress the real magnitude of the rebellion.

⁸ Blackburne, 20 May 1803, letter to Madras, Political Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 771-2.

⁹ Madras Council, 18 June 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, p. 4599.

¹⁰ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 120.

On the 6th the insurgents began a heavy fire on the British positions. Two days later the columns, led by Vella Marudu and Chinna Marudu, attacked the British forces, pressed vigorously on their lines, and drove them off.¹¹ As the situation of Innes appeared precarious, Agnew, advancing from Tirupatore, took such a position as to assist the operations of the hard-pressed detachment. On the 18th Innes launched a second attack on Piranmalai but was again defeated with heavy loss. Humbled in their repeated endeavours, the British forces made another disgraceful retreat to Nattam.¹² On the 22nd upon the arrival of reinforcements, Innes moved to Satturusankarakottai, situated six miles away from Tirupatore. The detachment continued its march through a close wood but on the 26th the rebels, who had occupied strong positions in its front, perceiving their advantage, attacked the enemy, using rockets for the first time. Losing no time, Agnew rushed to the relief of Innes, prevailing on the besieging crowds to withdraw to the woods.¹³ The combined forces now took their route from Tirupatore for an assault on Piranmalai and to establish communications with Pudukkottai. Subsequently, however, they decided to change their direction, as the road to Piranmalai was of difficult access, being intersected by hills and jungles and occupied by large groups of pike men, ready to challenge their progress. On the 28th of July the forces encamped at Okkur. The armed parties, considering the town indefensible, evacuated it. The assailants fortified it into a military post.¹⁴

Assisted by the princes of Thanjavur and Pudukkottai, the Company assembled a large force for an eastern campaign on the bank of the River Kaveri. Not only did Rajah Serfoji and the Tondaiman assist the enemy but incited the inhabitants particularly the Kallar tribes to fight against the patriots. This internal dissension greatly weakened the rebel influence in the Kaveri basin.¹⁵ On the 17th of July the combined forces of the English and their allied princes, commanded by Blackburne, commenced the opera-

¹¹ Revenue Sundries, 9 July 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 623-7.

¹² Madras Council, 4 August 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 286, pp. 5348-9.

¹³ Ibid., 4 August 1801, Ibid., Vol. 286, pp. 5348-9 and 5367-70.

¹⁴ Revenue Sundries, 28 July 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 646-8.

¹⁵ Madras Council, 8 August 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 286, p. 5518.

tions along the coast. In the battles of Arandangy and Adiarkudi the rebels sustained reverses. Mounting pressure together with internal discord compelled the insurgents to evacuate the northern region of Thanjavur and to withdraw to the jungles which stretched to the south.¹⁶

British Humiliation

Siruvayal, the headquarters of Marudu Pandyan, was a clean town with broad and regular streets and well-built houses.¹⁷ On the 27th of July the combined forces of Agnew and Innes began their march from Okkur to Siruvayal. The enemy experienced no fierce opposition for the first two days, after which they found their task formidable, for they had to manoeuvre for every inch of land. The road passed through a cultivated tract, lying between two jungles but it was so much interrupted by high banks and extensive rows of palmyra trees that it gave excellent cover to the rebels in every direction. Numerous parties occupying the banks and woods on the way harassed the troops from the commencement to the end of a short but tedious march. When they were pushed from the front, they moved round to the flanks and rear, accompanying the detachment with a teasing fire at all times. Waging a constant battle against the attackers, the weary troops encamped within two miles of Siruvayal on the 29th. The next day the detachment moved to attack the defiant town. The rebels had made entrenchments connected with the bunds of the tanks, located advantageously to support each other. A battery was regularly formed in their centre. The armed groups collected together but when Agnew made a disposition to attack the flanks of their line and advanced forward with a heavy fire, they abandoned their positions. They set fire to the beautiful town and nearby villages and under the cover of a distant fire withdrew to the barriers in the jungles of Kalayarkoil. As all the forage was destroyed and as the country afforded no grazing field for the numerous pack cattle, the enemy experienced considerable difficulty. The assailants having entered the destroyed town, had a clear look at the tower of the Pagoda of Kalayarkoil, which was visible beyond.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 4 August 1801, Ibid., Vol. 286, pp. 5380-4.

¹⁷ James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 92.

¹⁸ Revenue Sundries, 31 July 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 649-51.

TAMILNADU



MAP VI. Ref. Map No. 189. State Archives, Madras

On the 31st of July powerful detachments began the operation against the rebel strongholds in the jungles of Kalayarkoil. The insurgents assembled in strength in this almost inaccessible forest, ready to contest the hostile venture. Large groups of pioneers and wood-cutters, who were pressed into service, began the work on a road for the movement of the army. However, as the patriots were determined to check the enemy, their resistance became more and more obstinate as the road progressed. Each day brought its dismal tale of casualties. On the 31st of July the workers cleared a road of one and a half miles in the direction of Kalayarkoil. The rebels made a feeble attempt to challenge but were driven off. On the 1st of August the pioneers cut three-quarters of a mile, the next day 600 yards and the next day 430 yards. Fire was exchanged all these days. On the 4th the work on the road progressed by 580 yards. The insurgents attacked the detachment of Innes but withdrew after a short but furious battle. Eighteen bodies were left on the field while many more with broken pikes were seen in a tank. On the 5th the working party completed the road for 450 yards and the next day 237 yards. After erecting a high bank across the road and forming hedges, the armed parties contested the enemy on the 6th, killed a few of the troops and then withdrew. On the 7th the rebels again took their position on the bank, but were dislodged. The next day the bank was again seen raised, hedged and defended, but was stormed. These days the road progressed for 850 yards. As the bank was again manned on the 9th, Major Sheppard occupied it and fortified it into a post. On the 10th the road was cut for 500 yards, on the 11th 450 yards and on the 12th another 450 yards, on the 13th 250 yards and on the 14th 350 yards. Taking their stand behind the barriers, the insurgents engaged the troops of Sheppard in a resolute attack but lost 200 men killed or wounded. In spite of this, on the 15th they opened a heavy cannonade and a constant fire of musketry and forced the working party to withdraw to the camp.¹⁹ On the 15th of August Agnew wrote in disgust to Madras that the pioneers and wood cutters had laboured incessantly but the increasing closeness of the jungle had retarded their progress so much that the road was still unfinished. The supply of labour was reduced by sickness and desertion due to the dread of rebel fire, to which

¹⁹ James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 92-104.

they were frequently exposed. On the night of the 14th the road had been advanced five miles and the Pagoda of Kalayarkoil was seen over the trees; it appeared less than a mile away on the 15th of morning. When the pioneers resumed the work, a battery of several guns, concealed by the rebels in the jungles, opened fire and rendered the work impossible.²⁰

On the 16th of August the forces moved to the bank from where the insurgents launched the attack the previous days but found it so strongly fortified both by nature and art that they abandoned their design to occupy it. The next two days the workers cut a narrow road of 1,700 yards. The rebel cannon impeded the British progress. Agnew directed Captain Weston who commanded a select party to take it at all cost yet no success came. On the 19th when the force reached a bank, the rebels fired several sarabogies, a kind of park guns, normally used for firing salutes. Immediately armed parties, assembling from all directions, opened a tremendous firing. Carried away by a combination of rashness and daring, they besieged very closely the hostile positions, well-defended by heavy guns. As the surging parties reached within ten yards, the enemy's guns discharged a few rounds. Screams and groans followed. Intermittent fire continued from the distant posts of the rebels but a few moments later all were hushed. The patriots suffered very heavy casualties; the blood of the fleeing was traceable in every direction in the jungles. Yet well-prepared for any sacrifice, they continued their bitter resistance with indomitable courage. The English forces succeeded in beating the besieging crowds every hour but the moment they felt relieved, they found themselves surrounded and attacked from all sides. A party under Weston sought to seize the cannon from the rebels, but as the latter threatened a flanking thrust for the control of the road, abandoned the enterprise. Repeated efforts were made to pursue the work on the road day after day but the insurgents, taking their positions under the cover of banks and entrenchments against which the troops could seldom advance, baffled it. The heavy loss that they suffered in every action appeared to have had little impact upon their patriotic will to resist. On the contrary the reverses suffered by the forces of the Company and their con-

²⁰ Agnew, letter to Madras, Military Consultations, 20 October 1801, Vol. 288, pp. 6837-9.

stant exposure to the burning sky left their impress, lasting and indelible, upon their will. The pioneers were convinced that it was no more possible to continue the work on the road.²¹ Driven to desperate straits, Agnew sought to open communications with the other British posts, to gain reinforcements, to elude the vigilance of the gallant patriots and to escape assault by frequent showers of bullets, yet found himself repeatedly baffled, thwarted and surrounded. The humiliation, that appeared inevitable, reduced him to the alternative of retreat. On the 26th of August the British forces took their route back to Tirupatore, thence to Partimangalam and then to Siruvayal. The rebels chased the retreating enemy until the latter reached Siruvayal.²²

A strong body of troops, led by Innes, moved to Tirumayam to bring provisions. On its return to Siruvayal, Agnew sent his detachment to relieve the much harassed force. The insurgents now lined on every bank and eminence but their attempt to ambush the enemy failed. The armed groups collected in strength in the jungles in preparation for a counter-attack. Considering his position quite untenable Agnew on the 30th decided to abandon the much cherished project of advancing to Kalayarkoil from the side of Siruvayal. He ordered his forces to retreat to Okkur and from there to Nellikkottai. James Welsh depicted the reaction of the rank and file to this decision: 'The rejoicing was unanimous at the prospect of leaving a place which had been the grave of so many of our brave comrades . . . we had been foiled by cowards, of such a persevering nature, however, that although beating them every hour, they had succeeded so completely to surround us, that we could neither send a letter nor receive one, even from Pallamcottah (Palayamkottai) for a whole month'.²³ Subsequently, however, the tide of events turned in favour of the Company. The King's Scotch Brigade, Blackburne's detachments and the Tondaiman's troops that swelled the army of Agnew, rendered it formidable. Tempted by the Company's offer of the throne of Sivaganga, Woya Tevar of the royal house of this territory too went to the aid of the English, weakening thereby the rebel unity.²⁴

²¹ Revenue Sundries, 21 August 1801, Vol. 26, p. 659.

²² Madras Council, 4 August 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 286, p. 5390.

²³ James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 110-111.

²⁴ Revenue Sundries, 1 September 1801, Vol. 26, p. 665.

Tondaiman's Caution

Equally concerned at the humiliation suffered at the hands of the rebels in the jungles of Kalayarkoil as the Company was, Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman, Rajah of Pudukkottai, endeavoured to rehabilitate the shattered prestige of the aliens. He assisted the English with more of his troops and more provisions, and formulated a new strategy aimed at a revival of the sinking confidence in them. Late in August 1801, when Blackburne reached Arandangy, he invited him for a conference. The two chieftains met on the 4th of September at a village, situated mid-way between Arandangy and Pudukkottai. In the course of his long discussion the Tondaiman furnished the details about the resources of the insurgents, disclosed the nature of the collusion of the native servants of the Company with the people in arms and reflected the most unequivocal solicitude for the speedy and complete annihilation of the insurgent power. Blackburne reported to the Madras Council what the Tondaiman suggested: 'Although Colonel Agnew's failure in his attack against Kalayarkoil and subsequent retreat would greatly excite the hopes and confidence of the rebels, his return, if speedy, would destroy all these hopes and plunge them into the deepest despondency by displaying the fixed determination of the Government to subdue them. No time, he said, should be lost as well from a view to impress this conviction upon the minds of the rebels to the greatest advantage as to save the troops from the approaching rains.

'Marudu had always expected that Lieutenant Colonel Agnew would make his attack from the westward and in consequence all his hordes, grain, his magazines of arms and ammunition, his valuable effects and the families of himself and all his people were deposited and concealed in the jungles east and north-east of Kalayarkoil. To the eastward also the sea was open to him for his supplies of saltpetre etc., and the province of Ramnad yielded him recruits and provisions of various kinds. Upon these grounds Tondaiman said he ventured to suggest the propriety of a strong detachment to the eastward of Kalayarkoil to cut off the communication of the rebels with the sea and the province of Ramnad and to press upon and penetrate into the jungles above alluded to. If this measure could be adopted, he thought, the war might

be at an end in a fortnight for when their families were in danger, the followers of Marudu would instantly desert him, if they did not seize him and deliver him into the hands of the Company'.²⁵

Destruction of Rebel Sea Power

Even before the Tondaiman suggested to Blackburne the destruction of the vessels employed by the insurgents for the importation of grain and arms, the issue had engaged the attention of the Company. Several doneys, steered by oars, brought large supplies across the seas and four hundred men, employed in the service of the rebels, regularly transported the imports to the jungles of Sivaganga. In consequence they were enabled to harass the invading forces through the destruction of their fields. Reports on rebel communications indicated that the doneys brought in large supplies to Tondi in the third and fourth weeks of August 1801. The Company pressed a gun-boat into service to patrol the coastal waters for intercepting supplies and destroying the doneys.²⁶

Before day-break on the 4th of September 1801 *Schuler*, the gun boat, went into operation in the Bay of Tondi. At 7.00 a.m. it attacked and seized two large vessels laden with paddy bound for Pamban. It learned from the crew that two more doneys, each with twenty armed rebels, were heading towards the port of Tondi. Before long the cutter coming across, chased them till 9.00 a.m. A calm and still sea prevented the gun boat from continuing the pursuit and enabled the rebel vessels to escape by means of their oars. When the wind began to blow and became favourable, the *Schuler* resumed the hunt and sailed to Tondi, which it reached at 5.00 p.m. but only to see all the doneys lying dry on the shore and the cargo already unloaded. The boat cruised the shore waters for the next two days but could not apprehend more of the rebel vessels. Subsequently, however, it discovered six doneys steering to the shore, overpowered them in an action and captured all. The British sailors, advancing to the shore, set fire to numerous vessels which were found deserted. On the 8th the insurgents, about a

²⁵ Blackburne, 4 September 1801, Report to Madras, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6936-42.

²⁶ Tinnevely Collectorate Records, 20 August 1801, No. 3579, pp. 88 and 115.

hundred in number, made a daring attempt to attack the gun boat. Emerging out of their huts on the shore of Pamban, they rushed across the waves up to four feet deep in the sea and shot a few but distant rounds. The cutter moving to a favourable position, opened a well-directed fire and repulsed the attack. Many of the rebels were killed; their bodies were found floating on the sea.²⁷ The destruction of vessels and the loss of the control of the Bay of Tondi administered a severe blow to the sustaining forces of the struggle.

Divided Camp of Insurgents

The enemy followed up the blockade of the Bay of Tondi with a successful attempt at the creation of dissensions within the rebel ranks. Having failed in persuading Vella Marudu to join the side of the Company against his brother Chinna Marudu, the English promoted rivalry in the ruling house of Sivaganga. At the instance of the Company, Padmattur Woya Tevar, a member of the royal family, contested the claims of Vengum Peria Wodaya Tevar, the ruler under whom the Marudus served as ministers. With this development the rebel camp was sundered into two warring factions and tormented by rivalry.

As no followers could be obtained immediately, the Tondaiman hired out 250 of his peons for service with Woya Tevar. Escorted by them the traitor prince reached the camp of Blackburne at Arandangy on the 12th of August. Eager to project the image of the rival prince, the troops of the Company accorded a pompous but patched-up welcome. Blackburne reported to Madras: 'I caused the line to fall in and salute Woya Tevar as he passed, and received him with those marks of distinction which I thought the best calculated to make a strong impression of the reality of the elevation upon the rebellious provinces'.²⁸ From Arandangy, Woya Tevar, accompanied by more people, proceeded to the camp of Agnew at Sivaganga. On the 12th of September 1801 in a ceremonious function at Cholapuram, the ancient capital of Sivaganga, attended with much display and ostentation, deliberate

²⁷ Board of Revenue, 28 September 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 298, pp. 12080-3.

²⁸ Blackburne, 12 August 1801, letter to Webbe, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, p. 6908.

though they were, Agnew installed Woya Tevar as the rajah of the state.²⁹

The elevation of Woya Tevar to a show of royal status misguided the simple-minded inhabitants. As a prince of the ruling house joined the Company, it exercised an adverse impact upon their loyalty to the cause of Rebellion. The people of Nalukottai, Okkur, Erakur, Partimangalam and Paghinery, deserting the insurgent camp, went over to Woya Tevar. The intimate knowledge of the woods of Kalayarkoil, possessed by these deserters, the guidance given by Woya Tevar and the dissensions created in the rebel camp greatly assisted the Company in its subsequent campaigns.³⁰

Coastal Campaign

Though an extensive region of Thanjavur remained under the rebel domination, Blackburne made no immediate attempt to re-occupy it. Warranted by strategic considerations, he led his forces to the south-west, aimed at assisting the operations of Agnew in Sivaganga.³¹ Messages transmitted by the Tondaiman indicated that the insurgents, led by Marudu Pandyan and Oomathurai, had encamped in Palaynad and lay in wait to cut off Innes' retreat

²⁹ Revenue Sundries for 1801, Vol. 26, p. 48 and Madras Council, 7 July 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, p. 4873.

James Welsh has given a description of the installation of the prince: 'The Brahmins having fixed on the 12th of September as an auspicious day for the inauguration of the new ruler of Sivaganga Wodaya Tevar rose with the lark, adorned himself like a peacock and moved in state to the Pagoda of Cholapuram. When ceremonies were over, a reception was arranged in a pandal. Agnew in full costume after the customary salutations presented him with a superb dress. On the arrival of the rajah in front of the pandal Agnew on his right and Innes on his left escorted him to a carpet. After silence was obtained, the proclamation of his elevation was read out and a salute of eleven guns was fired. The two colonels then conducted the prince to a carriage fitted on an elephant. A procession now started with the cavalry forming an advance and rear guard, withdrawn swords, a flourish of trumpets, a march from the band, the local music struck up and a peal of shots and shrieks rent the air. At the end of the procession the two colonels again conducted the rajah to the pandal'. (*Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 115-117).

³⁰ Revenue Sundries for 1801, Vol. 26, p. 28 and Madras Council, 7 July 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 285, p. 4873.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 286, p. 5518.

from Tirumayam. They reconstructed their post at Arriawortawoody, which Innes had destroyed, and garrisoned it with 5,000 armed men, while 3,000 took their position in the village of Kundadive, situated eight miles away from Shawkottai.³² Anxious to draw the rebels from the route of Innes' retreat in his attempt to relieve him, Blackburne marching through Shawkottai, reached Kundanur in Palaynad. He sent a probing expedition to the rebel camp but was driven back. In a bid to intercept Blackburne's march but without understanding the real intentions of the enemy a large section of the insurgents, posted at Tirupatore, advanced to a distance of twenty miles. This distraction prevented them from acting in co-operation with the column led by Marudu Pandyan and Oomathurai. As this diversion seemed favourable, the detachment of Innes moved out from Tirumayam on the morning of the 28th of August and transmitted a message to Blackburne that it had reached a secure distance. Having effected his objective in affording relief to Innes, but forbidden by prudence to remain at Palaynad because of the possibility of rebel flanking operations both from Kundadive and Arriawortawoody, the detachment of Blackburne by forced marches retreated to Arandangy.³³ From here he sent two expeditions, one to the south and the other to the west. The southern expedition, led by Lieutenant Maclean, moved against the rebels of Ramnad in co-operation with the forces of Macaulay. The western expedition, headed by Jenkondan, advanced to Terboinad in Sivaganga, the inhabitants of which territory offered their steadfast support to the Rebellion in disregard to the Company's offers of pardon and oblivion. In support of this second expedition Blackburne himself marched to within twenty miles of Siruvayal. Motivated by vindictiveness the English forces cut down the population and burned down the villages.³⁴

With the rebel power of resistance in Thanjavur greatly crippled, the British army, reinforced by the troops of Pudukkottai and Ettayapuram, moved in strength against Ramnad: Macaulay from the south and Maclean from the north. When Agnew threatened Siruvayal, Vella Marudu, who was engaged in the siege

³² Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, p. 6932.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6925-30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6943-51.

of Komeri, returned to the west after entrusting the task with Muthu Karuppa Tevar. On the 13th of August a body of troops, led by Miller, advanced to Komeri at the orders of Macaulay, repulsed the siege and dispersed the insurgents.³⁵ The enemy gained more victories in the bitter engagements, that followed. The combined forces of Martinz and Miller attacked and expelled the rebels who had encamped in the vicinity of the fort of Ramnad, waiting for an opportunity to assault this stronghold of the enemy. On the 27th of August Macaulay routed the armed parties of Melappan in a fiercely contested battle at Abiramam, but the rebel chief made his escape.³⁶ Maclean in the meantime undertook an extraordinary march from Arandangy through the rebel-held territories towards Ramnad. On the 29th of August he defeated the rebels led by Puttoor and stormed Warrior. Though the rebel chief escaped, more than fifty of his men were killed in battle and twenty-seven imprisoned. In consequence of this victory he regained possession of the territory extending from the borders of Thanjavur and Sivaganga to the fort of Ramnad.³⁷ Anxious to relieve the hard-pressed rebels of the east, Marudu Pandyan sent a body of 3,000 armed men under the command of Oomathurai, but as the threat to Kalayarkoil assumed serious dimensions, he recalled them. Enabled by these successes, Macaulay left Ramnad by the end of September and advanced to the borders of Sivaganga to assist the operations of Agnew in the jungles of Kalayarkoil.³⁸

Fall of Kalayarkoil

The Pagoda of Kalayarkoil, the rallying point of the patriots and the target of the British offensive, was a beautiful structure, surrounded by a stone wall eighteen feet in height. The rebels humbled the enemy in the first thrust, but the subsequent turn of events greatly eroded their power of defence and counter-attack. The control of the coastal waters had been lost, vast territories had been reoccupied and the unity of their ranks had been shaken. Demoralisation coupled with the intrigues by princes allied to the

³⁵ Revenue Sundries, 7 September 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 673-5.

³⁶ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6850-6.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 6943-51.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 6960-1.

enemy, led to desertion and return of the peasants to their fields. The Company in the meantime employed Khaleel, who appeared closely acquainted with the rebel positions, to gather intelligence for the formulation of a new strategy against Kalayarkoil.³⁹ Disguised as hunters, Khaleel and his select men explored the jungles, discovered the secret routes leading to the Pagoda of Kalayarkoil and safely returned to the British camp.⁴⁰ Guided by the reports furnished by them, Agnew carried out fresh preparations for an expedition from Okkur instead of from Siruvayal to the rebel stronghold. After Waya Tevar had been proclaimed the ruler of Sivaganga, the detachments left Cholapuram and marching through Melur reached Singampunari on the 19th of September. As the occupation of rebel forts in this jungle was of consequence for the success of the expedition, Agnew detached two forces: one to Piranmalai, which withstood the repeated assaults made by Innes, and the other to Nandikottai. The overwhelming military superiority which the enemy brought to bear upon the rebel positions enabled it to reduce them to submission.⁴¹ On the 17th of September Major Doveton, at the command of a powerful column, advancing through Vellatara encamped at Piranmalai. An attack was made but was repulsed. However, in the course of a second attack a cavalry charge supported by a well-directed fire turned the scale and the fort fell.⁴² After consolidating the gains, the army reached Okkur, where Innes in the meantime employed pioneers to strengthen its defences, and stored arms in preparation of the contemplated offensive.⁴³

On the 30th of September 1801 British detachments marched on Kalayarkoil from all directions. In an attempt to mislead the rebels Agnew announced that he had decided to storm the fort in the evening of the 1st of October and detached a party to the town of Sivaganga, so that they might expect the offensive from that direction. Thereupon he decided to push through Vaniamkudi, Collumbum and Muthoor. The road leading to Collumbum was

³⁹ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6865-6.

⁴⁰ *Sivagangai Charithira Seemai*, p. 76.

⁴¹ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6844 and 6859.

⁴² James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 119.

⁴³ Revenue Sundries, 5 September 1801, Vol. 26, p. 667.

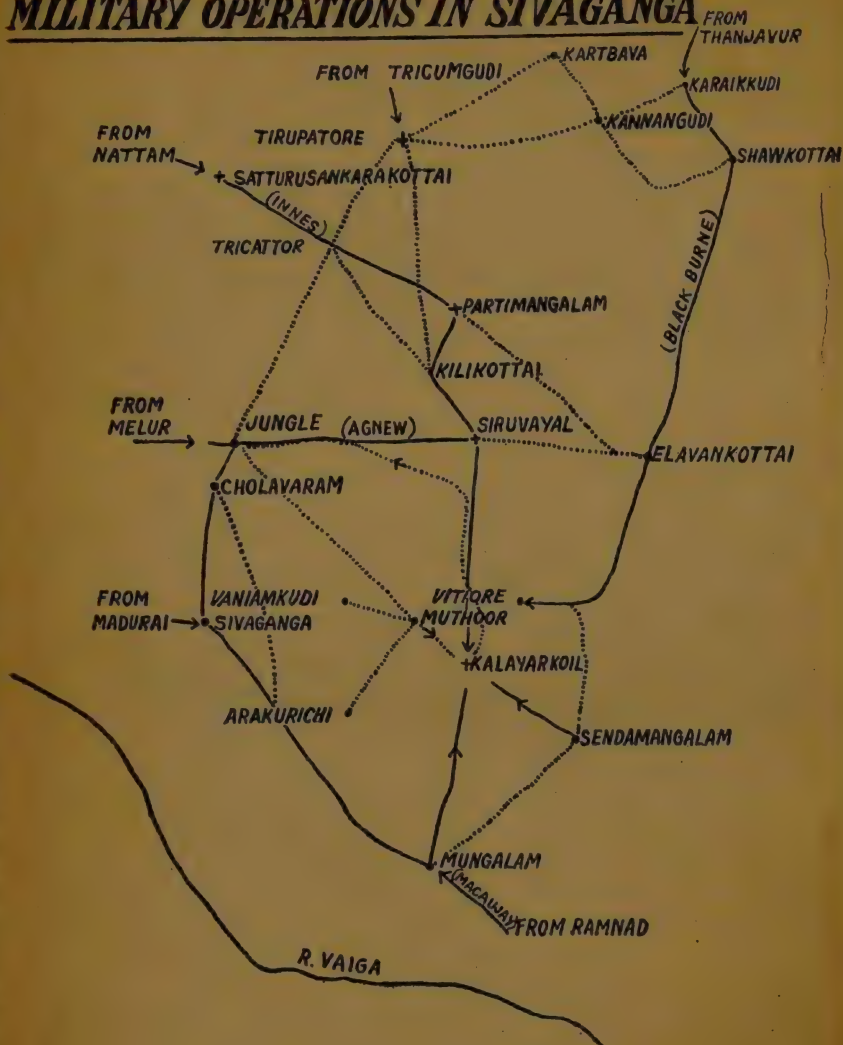
found blocked up by thorny fences. The detachment was fired on near the entrance of the road from a barrier to the jungle. Agnew detached a party to turn the flank of the rebels, while a gun that was mounted in front opened a fire to draw away their attention. The troops suffered considerable loss in this battle but succeeded in dislodging the armed columns from their post. On approaching Muthoor a rebel party, which had taken its stand on a bank in front of the village, opened a distant fire but was forced to withdraw to the interior of the wood. Another detachment, led by Innes, meanwhile moved towards Chalapuram, after which it turned to the direction of Kalayarkoil. He reported to Agnew that the insurgents strongly posted on the barriers which were raised across an extremely difficult road, received his detachment with a heavy fire but were dispersed by a gallant charge near a tank. In this engagement a hundred of the rebels were killed. The forces reached Keeranoor, situated in the vicinity of Kalayarkoil and proceeded with the successful reduction of Kallakudi.⁴⁴ The Scotch Brigade, led by Lieutenant Colonel Spry, advanced through the direct road from Okkur to Kalayarkoil, while a fourth detachment commanded by Major Sheppard through another route, ready to assist the former. The forces led by Macaulay and Blackburne after their prolonged campaigns in Ramnad attacked the jungles from the south and from the east respectively. The expeditions were so co-ordinated as to outmanoeuvre the patriots and to avert a second humiliation to the British flag.⁴⁵

The menacing thrust of the hostile forces from all directions threw the rebel columns into panic. Spry in command of the Scotch Brigade, advancing through a close wood, launched a powerful attack on the Pagoda at the dawn of the 1st of October. The resistance of the insurgents, barriers on the Muthoor road and the darkness of the night had so much impeded the march of Agnew that he could not reach the rebel stronghold until 8.00 a.m. The other detachments however overwhelmed all resistance on the roads and encircled the Pagoda in accordance with the preconcerted plan. Marudu Pandyan led his column into an action against the forces of Agnew, but finding the Pagoda threatened from other directions,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21 October 1801, Vol. 26, pp. 697-9.

⁴⁵ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, p. 6867.

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MAP VII. Ref. Map No. 189. State Archives, Madras

rushed to take over the command of the defences. However it was too late, for the insurgents were thrown into confusion and all his endeavour to restore order among the ranks ended in futility. He reached Kalayarkoil barely in time to remove his people to safety. Many of the rebels died in the engagements, while the survivors fled to different directions, apparently without concert.⁴⁶ The fall of Kalayarkoil broke patriotic resistance. The enemy captured a large quantity of ammunition deposited in the woods. In recognition of the meritorious service and the guidance given to Spry in the operations, Agnew awarded one hundred *pagodas* as reward to Mohammad Khalil.

The principal leaders of the Rebellion took their route to Mangalam. In a bid to apprehend them, Agnew sent his troops in that direction, while he himself continued to occupy a station on the western side of the woods of Kalayarkoil. Captain Munro led a party in search of the fugitives but could not come across any. Expresses were sent to Macaulay and Blackburne, urging them to be on the alert but the rebels had already effected their escape.⁴⁷ A body of the insurgents, led by Oomathurai, Sevatiah and Muthu Vella Nayak, moved in a northern direction through Tirupatore, while another party headed by Marudu Pandyan took its route to the jungles of Singampunari.⁴⁸ The Tondaiman sent numerous parties to comb the rebel resorts in the woods. He captured more than hundred families of the fugitives and handed them over to the custody of the British troops.⁴⁹ Blackburne and Maclean proceeded with the reoccupation of territories still retained by the armed groups of Ramnad. Their detachments scattered a column of 2,000 rebels in a battle fought at Shawkottai. On the 5th of October Blackburne advanced to Karaikudi, separated from Shawkottai by an extension of the jungle of Singampunari, seven miles in depth and uncommonly close and strong. A body of troops in the meantime went into operation at his orders in another extension of the same jungle, that separated Karaikudi from

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20 October 1801, Ibid., Vol. 288, pp. 6864-7.

⁴⁷ Revenue Sundries, 21 October 1801, Vol. 226, pp. 700-702.

⁴⁸ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6895-7 and 6936.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6959.

Siruvayal. Assisted by the forces of the Tondaiman, Blackburne occupied the rebel posts and consolidated his control.⁵⁰

Last Retreat and Desperate Bid

The patriots who fled northwards, numbered about 600 and appeared extremely dispirited. Enfeebled by sickness and disabled by wounds, they carried with them neither arms nor ammunition. Added to this they suffered miserably for want of food and rest.⁵¹ Soon after the news of rebel movement reached the English, they warned the inhabitants against assisting the fugitives in any form with either arms, ammunition, food, shelter or guidance.⁵² On the 8th of October Lieutenant Frith, commanding at Nattam, reported to Agnew that the rebels were passing by slow progress northward within three or four miles of his camp. The next day he informed him that they had inclined towards the hills of Dindigul. The troops of the Tondaiman sought to intercept the insurgents but retreated after they suffered a reverse in an engagement.⁵³ On the 10th of October Major Burrows detached a force on hearing a report that Oomathurai and Muthu Vella Nayak, who led the rebels northward, had halted on the bank of a tank at 2 p.m. for cooking their rice, but before the enemy reached the spot the leaders made their escape.⁵⁴

Reinforced by the armed inhabitants, the desperate insurgents formed themselves into two columns and threatened Virupakshi on the 10th. They expelled the troops from the British post, after which they made a probe into the camp of a detachment commanded by Major Jones at Chitrampatti. When the troops prepared for an action, the rebels withdrew, but again returned, occupying a strong position between two hills, where they were joined as Jones reported, 'by the whole of the village-people belonging to the village of Chitrampatti and others in this district, all armed, which increased their numbers to 1,000 men, 500 more were expected to join them in the course of the night. We remained

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 6975.

⁵¹ Madras Council, December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7712.

⁵² Ibid., p. 7704.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 7689-90.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 7697.

there until past sun-set without being able to draw them out of their strong situation or attacking there with any probability of success, their number being so great as to render it probable we should have been totally surrounded'. In consequence the forces of Jones moved for safety to Iyagudy. The insurgents, 2,000 strong and commanded by Oomathurai, took possession of the hills and strengthened their hold on Virupakshi.⁵⁵ Large bodies of armed peasants joined the veterans and swelled the rebel strength to 4,000 within two days of the occupation of Virupakshi.⁵⁶ The reports that the inhabitants continued to rally to the rebel standard caused considerable alarm in the English camp and on the 13th T. B. Hurdis, Collector of Dindigul, reported to Agnew that the numbers of insurgents 'are daily increasing by other Rebels flocking towards them, in numbers too great for my peons to encounter'.⁵⁷

Greatly exercised over this quite unanticipated and ominous turn of events, the Company again rushed through an agonising process of military preparedness. Agnew sent urgent instructions to Innes on the 9th of October. As the inhabitants of Dindigul 'shew a disposition to join them (the insurgents), it is indispensable that the utmost expedition should be used in attacking them, before they have arranged their preparations for defences. . . . Act vigorously in punishing the inhabitants of the villages who have aided or joined the Rebels. . . . Should you on trial of strength find your force inadequate to attain the object I will move with all the troops I can safely draw from this district (Sivaganga) to Virupakshi but no time must be lost as the enemy (the rebels) may gain strength and confidence by delay'.⁵⁸ Again on the 12th Agnew urged Innes: 'I need not recommend to you to move towards and attack the Rebels with the utmost expedition, as you are well aware of the importance of preventing them from strengthening their position, assembling their connexions, or recovering from their fatigue

⁵⁵ Captain Jones, 11 October 1801, letter to Agnew, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, pp. 7707-9.

⁵⁶ Madras Council, 27 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6896-6905.

⁵⁷ T. B. Hurdis, 13 October 1801, letter to Agnew, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7715.

⁵⁸ Agnew, 19 October 1801, letter to Innes, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 375-8.

and panic'.⁵⁹ On the 16th Agnew wrote to Collector Hurdis: 'If no time is given them to make works, to gain confidence and provide ammunition and grain, they must soon fall victim to their infatuation'.⁶⁰

As surprise was of importance for the suppression of this insurrection, which was fast assuming threatening proportions, Innes, losing no time, assembled a powerful detachment consisting of the details of the Fifth Regiment of Native Cavalry, parties from the Scotch Brigade, the King's Twelfth Infantry, a battalion of Native Infantry and groups of pioneers. In anticipation of intercepting the rebel advance to Dindigul the expedition by forced marches reached Anuringudi on the 10th but the reports indicated that the rebels had already carried the hills of Virupakshi. On the 12th the forces encamped at Dindigul after completing a tedious march of seventy-six miles in three days.⁶¹ As the detachment at his command found itself unequal to the task, Innes sent an express for reinforcements. Now fresh regiments from Madurai, the Malay Corps and more of flank companies reached Dindigul.⁶²

The rebellion in Dindigul synchronised with another wave of outbreaks in Tirunelveli. Since the suppression of the late rising headed by Oomathurai, Lushington, the Collector, sought to calm the distraction and re-establish order but from the difficulty of finding personnel, who would engage in an employment which they considered very hazardous, his endeavour made no progress. Most of the rebels fled to the jungles where war and hunger pursued them, yet entertaining a conviction that their situation was not so hopeless as to preclude the expectation of their success in their patriotic struggle, still carried on in other regions, they remained obdurate. The broken bands who were waiting for an opportunity with remarkable perseverance, marshalled their resources and regrouped under the leadership of an organising genius, Dalawai Pillai. Gathering strength in the extreme south, they established

⁵⁹ Agnew, 12 October 1801, letter to Innes, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7700.

⁶⁰ Agnew, 16 October 1801, letter to Hurdis, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, p. 89.

⁶¹ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6901-2.

⁶² Ibid., 1 December 1801, Ibid., Vol. 289, p. 7723.

themselves in Nanguneri.⁶³ The local inhabitants particularly the Marawas of Kalakkad, headed by Rama Tevar, joined the rebels.⁶⁴ In October the insurgents raised commotion in the district. However before they could extend their influence, the forces sent by Collector Lushington went into operation and hunted them down. Induced by a liberal reward of 1,000 *chakrams*, parties chased and seized Dalawai Pillai and handed him over to the enemy.⁶⁵ This marked the failure of another valiant bid made by the patriots of Tirunelveli.

Collapse of the Rebellion

As in the extreme south the early suppression of the desperate struggle in Dindigul, appeared an imperative necessity in the interest of British security. The popular bitterness continued so profound that the possibility that it would spark off more of extensive outbreaks appeared strong. To forestall the spread of the rebellion, Innes planned a vigorous and co-ordinated campaign. As the insurgents dispersed themselves in the valley of Dindigul, he deemed it essential to circumscribe them, to cut off their communications with the other provinces and to block the escape routes. After attaining these objectives, he decided to commence simultaneous operations from different points so as to force the rebels to stand an attack at Virupakshi or to disperse through the jungles of Anamalai.⁶⁶ As the fugitives established themselves in the hills and the inhabitants extended their full support, the enemy concluded that extensive campaigns would be required to suppress their resistance completely. Nevertheless with the flight of the fugitives there swelled the tide of continued insurrection.

On the 12th of October at the orders of Innes a body of troops which was posted at Nattam, moved to Virupakshi. Determined to intercept the British march, the rebels made an irruption from the western hills of Virupakshi, but for want of fire-arms their venture failed.⁶⁷ In the meantime a regiment of cavalry and

⁶³ Board of Revenue, 16 November 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 302, p. 13537.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14 January 1802, Proceedings, Vol. 307, p. 552.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 19 November 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 302, p. 13718.

⁶⁶ Madras Council, 20 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 6901-2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 6905-6.

infantry led by Major Burrows marched from Taddikambu to Shularumbur, where it was reinforced by two flank companies. On the 13th it occupied a position west of Virupakshi and sent a party to Iyagudi, where Captain Jones had taken shelter.⁶⁸ A detachment commanded by Major Leonard moved by the direct route from Dindigul to Virupakshi. Having effected a junction on the 14th, the combined forces of Innes and Burrows threatened Virupakshi. The insurgents, led by Oomathurai, seeking to check the progress of the enemy, engaged them in two battles at Chitram-patti but were defeated.⁶⁹ A party of 200 rebels was observed going to the villages for the collection of arms and money but were immediately charged by the horse of the Company. However the party got to the hills to the westward, effecting its escape by dispersing in the jungles, where it was impossible for the horse to continue the chase. On the 16th the troops encamped at Virupakshi. Insurgents, 500 strong, skirting the bank of a river, opened a sharp fire. But a party of the Scotch Brigade, led by Lieutenant MacArthur, went into action, while the large guns opened fire from another direction. After suffering heavy loss, the patriots abandoned their forward positions. A smart engagement, that followed, drove them from their barriers to the woods. Now they made an attempt to regroup themselves but it was thwarted. In the evening of the 16th the town of Virupakshi passed under the control of the enemy. The losses suffered by the English and the fatigue caused by constant exertion for days together, prevented them from following up their success immediately. As powerful bodies of rebels continued to hold the nearby barriers, Innes ordered his detachments to stay in their forward positions.

The intelligence gathered by the Company indicated that the main column of the insurgents had drawn towards the hills of Virupakshi, while small parties had taken their stand on Cowdelli, a key rock that commanded the Great Cormen Delli Barriers. The scarcity for water was so acute that it was expected that the rebels would descend from the hill to a rivulet at its bottom. As this circumstance seemed likely to yield result, Innes directed a party of rifles to penetrate through a close wood and to take possession

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 6901-2.

⁶⁹ Madras Council, 27 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, p. 7108.

of a strategic post of the rebels on a hill. Accordingly in the night the assailants surprised the rebel camp when many of them were away for the collection of provisions and bringing water. On the morning of the 17th the English gained possession of the strategic hill. The insurgents now lined up at the entrance to the Great Corman Delli Barriers, which they had almost rebuilt by employing a big labour force, working day and night. The enemy directed a heavy fire from the occupied hill against the rebel positions and mounted a fierce attack. Unable to repulse the charge, the patriots after suffering heavy toll of life, evacuated their lines of defence. The British forces promptly occupied the Great Corman Delli Barriers and seized a large quantity of grain, bazaar articles, tents, horses and bullocks.⁷⁰

Undeterred by this discomfiture and exasperated irreconcilably, the valiant patriots belonging to the different vanquished columns reassembled on the hills to continue the bitter struggle. Commanded by the indomitable Oomathurai, they moved swiftly to the valley of Dindigul in search of fresh centres of operation. Innes had posted the Second Regiment of Native Cavalry under Major Burrows at Shankulam near Kanniwadi at the most commanding point for guarding against rebel concentrations. Immediately after the intelligence of the descent of armed parties on the plains reached the English camp, the cavalry under the command of Major Burrows rushed in close pursuit. There followed a running battle of fifty-one miles, which culminated in a fierce engagement at Vettilagundu. The patriots, moving constantly with neither rest nor food nor water for three days together, at last gave way. Many of them died in battle, while Oomathurai with sixty-five of his followers fell into the hands of the enemy,⁷¹ in spite of his escape 'as it were by miracle, in every previous engagement, although every soldier in our camp was most anxious to destroy so notorious and celebrated a chieftain'.⁷² In exultation Innes wrote to Madras: 'I consider the apprehension of the Omay (Oomathurai) with so many of his adherents as a complete finish

⁷⁰ Innes, 16 October 1801, report to Madras, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 288, pp. 7108-12.

⁷¹ Madras Council, 27 October 1801, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 288, p. 7116.

⁷² J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 131.

to the Southern Troubles at least so far as relate to this province (Dindigul)'.⁷³ On the 4th of November 1801 Lushington reported to Madras: The discomfiture of insurgents in Dindigul and Nanguneri had completely disconcerted the design that had been formed of renewed outbreaks.⁷⁴

⁷³ Innes, 20 October 1801, letter to Josiah Webb, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, p. 7114.

⁷⁴ Lushington, 4 November 1801, letter to Board of Revenue, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 302, p. 13537.

CHAPTER XI

REVENGE AND EMBERS

THE VINDICTIVE enemy proceeded to take a terrible revenge upon the defeated patriots. Soon after the fall of Kalayarkoil the English advertised liberal rewards for the apprehension of the leaders and instituted a vigorous search of all their suspected resorts. Agnew set the following prices to be paid in full if the insurgents were handed over to the Company alive and half if dead: 1,500 *cully chakrams*¹ each for Marudu Pandyan and Vella Marudu and 1,000 each for Shevata Tambi, Sivagnanam, Doraiswamy, Muthuswamy, Karutha Tambi, Woodianen, Moolikutty Tambi,² Vengum Peria Wodaya Tevar of Sivaganga, Muthu Karuppa Tevar of Ramnad, Oomai Kumaraswamy of Panjalamkurichi and Bommi Nayak of Verapur.³

Execution of Patriots

Eager to gain the favour of the foreign power and carried away by the temptation incited by the rewards, numerous parties assisted by the British troops, moved into operation in search of the fugitives. On the 19th of October Marudu Pandyan was engaged in an action at Cholapuram, wounded and captured.⁴ The troops, which were ordered by Agnew to explore the jungle of Kalayarkoil, surprised a body of rebels that kept itself hiding in a recess. A hot pursuit resulted in the capture of many of them, who included Karutha Tambi and Moolikutty Tambi, the sons of Vella Marudu.⁵ Parties, detached by Blackburne, combed the thick

¹ A *coily* or *cully chakram* was exchanged for two ordinary *chakrams*. (B. S. Ward, *Memoir on Madura and Dindigul*, Vol. 3, p. 73). A silver *chakram* was exchanged for two rupees and four annas usually. (Military Country Correspondence for 1755, printed, p. ii).

² Shevata Tambi, Sivagnanam and Doraiswamy were the sons of Marudu Pandyan. Muthuswamy was the son of Shevata Tambi. And Karutha Tambi, Woodianen and Moolikutty Tambi were the sons of Vella Marudu.

³ Madras Council, 27 October 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, p. 7105.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7671.

⁵ Revenue Sundries, 4 October 1801, Vol. 26, p. 707.

woods of Singampunari, Shawkottai and Sherugudi.⁶ Innes embarked upon a hunt for the rebels in the hills of Dindigul, in consequence of which his troops apprehended and seized 773 rebels. Most of the fugitives from Dindigul, however, escaped to the inhospitable woods of Anamalai where many of them perished of hill fever. Among the leaders, who were secured from these jungles, were Muthu Vella Nayak, the son of Gopala Nayak, Muthu Vira, the associate of Gopala Nayak, and Tomachi Mudali, the rebel emissary who served in the camp of Dhoondaji Waug.⁷ Sevatiah, who fled to the south from Dindigul, was taken prisoner at Srivalliputtur in Tirunelveli.⁸ Soon after these leaders were apprehended, Governor Clive directed Agnew: 'Chinna Murdoo, Vella Murdoo, Omay, and all the principal Rebels who have been taken, and who may yet be taken shall be brought to immediate trial and punishment after the identity of their persons and their participation of the rebellion shall have been ascertained'.⁹

The English carried into effect by a summary process the execution of the patriots, normally at the centres of their activity. The leaders, who were hanged to death at different places in Dindigul in November 1801 included Gopala Nayak, the Poligar of Jallipatti and Muthu Vella Nayak.¹⁰ On the 3rd of December Innes condemned fifteen more of the rebels of Dindigul to death and six for banishment.¹¹ Gnanamuthu and Virappan, two rebels of note of Thanjavur, were sentenced to be tortured. Their properties were confiscated and severe punishment was inflicted upon

⁶ Ibid., 10 October 1801, Vol. 26, p. 777.

⁷ T. B. Hurdis, 22 October 1801, letter to Board of Revenue, Proceedings, Vol. 301, p. 13004.

⁸ Madras Council, 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7679.

⁹ J. Webbe, 28 October 1801, letter to Agnew, Military Consultations, Vol. 288, pp. 7120-1.

In July 1801 when the military operations were in progress several *kavalkars* were condemned to death for supporting the rebels. Among them were Nagamuthu of Adichanallur, Kumaraswami, Korali Muthu and Manikka Perumal of Malavarayan Nattam, Poovari Perumal Tevan of Srivaikuntam, Muthu Tevan, Choralloo Muthu and Sivanandi of Pakkamockani and Mara Swami Tevan of Attur. (Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 222-3).

¹⁰ Madras Council, 22 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 290, pp. 8064 and 8101-6.

¹¹ Ibid., 22 December 1801, Ibid., Vol. 290, p. 8062.

their persons; 500 lashes on each in front of the *cutcherry* at Shawkottai and another 500 in front of the *cutcherry* at Arand-angy.¹² Sivagnanam was executed at Komeri and Woodianen at Tiruchuzhi.¹³ Several insurgents, notably Setupati, the headman of Kallarnadu and Kanaka Sabhapathi Tevar, a chief of Ramnad, were hanged to death at Abiramam.¹⁴ Kuslavira Kunja Nayak of Kadalagudi was executed on the 12th of October 1801.¹⁵ Melappan was declared a freebooter and sent to the gallows.¹⁶ Shanmukhapathi, the leader of the Kallar tribe, was put to death in Kallarnadu.¹⁷ On the 24th of October Vella Marudu, Chinna Marudu, Shevata Tambi, his son Muthuswami, and Muthu Karuppa Tevar together with a large number of other patriots were executed on the ruins of the old fort of Tirupatore.¹⁸ James Welsh, an officer in the Company's army, who intimately knew Marudu Pandyan, has added a note on the last scene of the eventful career of this hero. He has stated: after Chinna Marudu was defeated in the battle of Kalayarkoil, he was chased like a wild beast, was badly wounded and captured. He was seen lingering with a fractured thigh in prison and was lastly beheld with his gallant brother, Vella Marudu and no less gallant son, Shevata Tambi, surrounded by other insurgents in chains upon a common gibbet.¹⁹ Indeed the glory of this great patriot was enhanced by the tragedy of his end. Sevatiah was carried from Dindigul to the south, where he was executed on the tower erected before the once much dreaded fort of Panjalamkurichi on the 16th of November.²⁰ Together with his gallant brother, poor Oomee too graced the gallows in reward for the most disinterested and purest patriotism.²¹

The spirit of revenge exhibited by the enemy knew no bounds.

¹² Ibid., December 1801, Ibid., Vol. 289, pp. 7754-5.

¹³ Ibid., p. 7675.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 7740.

¹⁵ Revenue Sundries, 12 October 1801, Vol. 26, p. 717.

¹⁶ Edward Clive, 20 October 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 33, p. 668.

¹⁷ Revenue Sundries, 17 October 1801, Vol. 26, p. 751.

¹⁸ Edward Clive, 20 October 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 33, p. 668.

¹⁹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

²⁰ Madras Council, 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7740.

²¹ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 131.

Haunted with calculated audacity, the overbearing invaders executed the popular leaders indiscriminately. No distinction was made between chieftain and servant, instigator and instigated, father and son, nay between grandfather and grandson, for they were all most iniquitously hanged together to death upon a common gibbet. The summary process adopted for the destruction of these patriots was both anomalous and irregular. The military tribunal, that condemned the rebels of Madurai country to death, normally consisted of only three officers. It does not appear that the evidence of any witness was taken and if it were taken, it was not definitely upon oath. The seventy-three year old rebel diplomat, Gopala Nayak, and several other leaders of Dindigul were executed even without waiting for the confirmation by the Madras Government. These grossly arbitrary proceedings led the Court of Directors to regret: '... although in very extreme cases it may be necessary to punish with instant Death the Ring-leaders or persons most actively concerned in Rebellion, or resistance in arms to the Company's authority, the mere fact of the existence of a Rebellion, or the exercise of such resistance will by no means justify the resorting to so dreadful an extremity of rigour'.²² Despite this barbarity, so crudely exhibited, the Indian allies of the Company conveyed their happiness and satisfaction at the victory of hostile arms in this war of liberation. On the 25th of October 1801 Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman of Pudukkottai wrote to the Madras Council: 'By the good fortune of the Company and your Lordship that Jungle Dog Chinna Marudu, his brother and family have lately been made prisoners by means of the bravery and policy of the Honourable Company's officers and as a reward for their treachery have suffered death. My Lord, in a long series of time I have observed that the French, Chanda Sahib, Tipu etc., notwithstanding the prosperity and power of the Company, having ventured to oppose their victorious forces, have been extirpated and annihilated, whilst the friends and dependents of the Company have been distinguished and honoured. What then could such a wretch as Marudu have expected?'²³ In no unmistakable terms

²² Court of Directors, 15 May 1805, Revenue Despatches from England, Vol. 3, pp. 338-348.

²³ The Tondaiman, 25 October 1801, letter to Madras, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7763.

Balarama Varma, the Rajah of Travancore, wrote to the Madras Governor on the 16th of January 1802: 'The flames of rebellion in the South had been extinguished and the rebels punished. Orders have been issued for the return of my troops from Malabar and the Carnatic and hence I am thankful. It is fit that the rebels should have received the punishment for their wickedness. The just giver of victory renders these successes of the British arms possible. The attachment of my ancestors from of old to the interests of the Company is manifest. I shall myself in like manner continue firm and steadfast in the path of our ancient connection'.²⁴

British Proclamation

On the 1st of December 1801 on the suppression of the rebels and execution of the leaders, the enemy issued a proclamation. Formulated to impress the people with the determination of the British government to consolidate its newly asserted power, it announced a policy of reconciliation of the vanquished and administered a warning to the inhabitants against any further attempt at defiance to its authority and guaranteed security to the allies. Beginning with an apparent note of sympathy for the fallen, the proclamation of Governor Edward Clive proceeds in a manner typical as of an imperialist ruler:

'The Right Honourable Governor in Council regrets that the desperate resistance opposed to the British troops should have been attended with so great a loss of lives to the deluded inhabitants. At the same time his Lordship deems it to be his duty to impress on the minds of the inhabitants, *sherogars* and *poligars* of the southern provinces the dangers of provoking the just indignation of the British Government and the fruitless attempt of opposing the untried strength of the rebels to the steadiness, valour and discipline of the British forces. The people of the southern provinces have now witnessed that the difficulty of resisting the force of the Company's Government in open arms is not greater than that of evading the perseverance, vigilance and activity of the English troops even in the native woods.

'From the centre of the jungles the authors of the late rebellion have been brought before the tribunals erected by the Governor

²⁴ Rajah of Travancore, 16 January 1802, letter to Lord Clive, translation, Political Consultations, Vol. 6, pp. 152-153.

in Council for the trial for that hateful and desperate offence. The infatuated obstinacy of those leaders in neglecting the warning voice with which the Governor in Council had announced to them the danger of Rebellion has rendered indispensably necessary the signal punishment of their crimes. His Lordship encourages a well-founded expectation that the ignominious manner to which those misguided chieftains have terminated their ambitious and criminal career will indelibly fix on the minds of their surviving families and inhabitants the danger of defying the British Government in arms.

‘At the same time that the Right Honourable Governor in Council directs the attention of the people of the southern provinces to the just punishment of unprovoked rebellion. His Lordship contemplates with just pride and satisfaction the example of steady attachment and honourable fidelity which the British Government has experienced from many of its dependents in the course of this unnatural and avoidable warfare, as in the former case the Governor in Council has been reluctantly compelled to exhibit a memorable example of the crime of sedition, so in the latter instance his Lordship in Council has had the pleasure of augmenting the security, wealth and happiness of those, whose zeal and loyalty have entitled them to the distinguished favour and protection of the British Government. Though the necessity of preserving tranquillity and regular government has compelled the Governor in Council to punish the authors of Rebellion, His Lordship has abstained from appropriating to the Company the lands forfeited by that dangerous crime, they (the rebels) will have had the satisfaction of noticing the confidence reposed by the British Government in its subjects by supplying those forfeited lands to the means of augmenting the estates of the faithful chiefs and from these examples they may derive the certain means of appreciating the principles of the British Government.’²⁵

‘The Right Honourable Governor in Council encourages a reasonable hope that the causes of future commotion in the southern

²⁵ The Company confiscated the lands of the rebel chiefs and gave them to its allied chieftains. This was done not only to punish the patriots but also to reward the traitors for their devoted service to it and to strengthen its own political influence. Yet it gave a distorted version about its motive so as to mislead the inhabitants.

provinces have been suppressed and the chieftains and other inhabitants will rely on the protection of the British Government in the assurance of their ancestors. His Lordship directs the people of the southern provinces to deliver their fire-arms for which compensation will be paid at the rate of ten rupees for each musket, five rupees for each matchlock and two rupees for each pike. However according to traditional practices and hereditary customs and the personal feelings of the chieftains the Governor in Council authorizes each of them to retain a certain number of peons carrying pikes for the purpose of maintaining the pomp and state heretofore attached to their persons.

'The Right Honourable Edward Lord Clive, Governor in Council of Fort St George and its Dependencies, having now laid the foundation of future permanent tranquillity in the southern provinces by the entire suppression of "the late, united, extensive and flagrant Rebellion", being farther enabled to corroborate those foundations by the establishment of the undivided authority of the Company's Government in those provinces and desirous of relieving the minds of the people from further solicitude of the punishment provoked by the late Rebellion, proclaims to the said inhabitants that with the exception of Vira Pandya Nayak and Muthiah Nayak of Panjalamkurichi, Melappan of Ramnad²⁶ and the persons now under restraint, whom it is his Lordship's intention to punish by banishment beyond the seas, the British Government now extends to all other persons who may have been seduced to follow the desperate fortunes of the principal rebels, a free and full pardon of the offences which they have committed against the Company. The Governor in Council therefore assures such persons as may have been implicated in the crime of the late Rebellion that His Lordship has relinquished every intention of prosecuting the punishment of that Rebellion deeming the examples already exhibited to their observation to convey a sufficient impression of the power of the British Government.²⁷

'In the confident expectation of reclaiming the people of the

²⁶ These leaders were not seized at the time of the issue of the proclamation, but only subsequently.

²⁷ Edward Clive, Proclamation, 1 December 1801, Secret Sundries, Vol. 26, pp. 483-494.

Melappan was subsequently condemned to death. (Military Despatches to England, 20 October 1802, Vol. 33, p. 668).

southern provinces from the habits of predatory warfare and in the hope of reducing them to resume the acts of peace and agriculture the Governor in Council announces to them that it is the intention of the Government to establish a permanent assessment of revenue upon the principles of zamindari tenures, which assessment being once fixed shall be liable to no change in any time to come, that the poligars becoming by these means zamindars of their hereditary estates will be exempted from all military service and the possessions of their ancestors will be secured to them under the operation of limited and definite laws, to be published as well for the purpose of restraining the British officers to the regulations and ordinances of the Government, as of securing to the people their property, their lives and religious usages of their respective castes.²⁸

Banishment Beyond the Seas

In accordance with its policy of revenge, as announced in the proclamation, the enemy proceeded to expel the leaders who escaped the gallows, beyond the seas. It condemned seventy-three patriots from the far south alone for perpetual banishment to Prince of Wales Island, Penang. The British official records furnish the list of these victims.

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| 1. | Vengum Peria Wodaya Tevar of Sivaganga, | |
| 2. | Doraiswamy, son of Marudu Pandyan | |
| 3. | Bomma Nayak of Verapur | |
| 4. | Jaganatha Ayyar, rebel amildar of Ramnad | |
| 5. | Andiappa Taven, | } Chief rebels of
} Karmalur in the
} Anioornadu |
| 6. | Sadamayan, | |
| 7. | Koniami Tevan | |
| 8. | Dalawai Kumara Swami Nayak of
Panjalamkurichi | |
| 9. | Kumara Tevar of Melur | |
| 10. | Pandian of Pandiamputtur | |
| 11. | Muthu Vira of Arankulam | |
| 12. | Sawmy of Manacaud | |
| 13. | Ramaswamy | |

²⁸ Madras Council, 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, pp. 7663-8.

14. Eralappa Tevar of Nanguneri
15. Pandyan Nayak of Combadi
16. Mauda Tevan
17. Malayil Madan
18. Chinna Pitcha Tevan
19. Vira Pandya Tevan
20. Vira Perumal Tevan
21. Karuppa Tevan
22. Suluamonia
23. Nanda Swamy
24. Perumal
25. Woodia Tevan, son of Chinna Pitcha Tevan
26. Devi Nayak, son of Chinna Pitcha Tevan
27. Muthu Rama Tevan
28. Manda Tevan
29. Payen
30. Alaga Nambi
31. Vaikunda Tevan
32. Siriana Tevan
33. Koniallum
34. Mullu Vedavoo
35. Santhanam
36. Virabhadran
37. Chalamban
38. Payen
39. Ramaswamy
40. Iralappan
41. Kumaraswami
42. Virapandyan
43. Venkatarayan
44. Woodiar
45. Muthu Rauk
46. Muthu Rauk of Anakulam
47. Choku Talavan of Trickernagudi
48. Iralappa Tevan
49. Mallaya Nayakkan of Elampatti
50. Sulvamonia Nayak of Katta Nayakkanpatti
51. Tomachi Nayak
52. Suluamonia Nayak of Audinore
53. Ramaswamy, grandson of the Poligar of Kulathur
54. Pitchandi Nayak of Eruvupoparam
55. Dalawai of Kallumaddam

Chiefs of
Nanguneri
and
Kalakkad

Rebels of
Nanguneri

56. Chinna Madan of Pasuvanthanai
57. Vaidim Murthi of Kandiswaram
58. Dalawai Pillai, a *deshakaval manigar*
59. Suluamaniam, his son
60. Peddana Nayak, who commanded the rebels
of Tutukudi
61. Krishnama Nayak, his son
62. Vaulan of Kulathur
63. Mylanen of Aracherry
64. Vayla Muthu of Kangarayakurichi
65. Raman of Suali
66. Balaya Nayak of Soorankudi in Nanjinadu
67. Kumaran
68. Vellia Kondan Vellian
69. Raman
70. Allega Chockoo
71. Sheik Hussain
72. Appah Nayak
73. Kuppanna Pillai

} Rebels of
Dindigul²⁹

Early in February 1802 the enemy sent all these condemned rebels to Tutukudi and placed them under the military custody of James Welsh. 'Admiral Nelson', the ship commissioned for the transport of the prisoners, anchored off the coast. Lieutenant Rockhead commanded the escort intended for the strict custody of the rebels. The prisoners boarded the ship and left their motherland for ever for their unknown destination on the 11th of February. What James Welsh has indicated as the silent reaction of Doraiswamy, the favourite son of Marudu Pandyan and young boy of hardly fifteen years, reflected the sentiments of all the patriots at their eternal departure from the land, in defence of which they fought so valiantly. He narrates: 'With a mild and dignified resignation, this amiable young man bore his cruel fate without a murmur; but such was the malancholy expression in his fine countenance that it was impossible to see and not commiserate him. . . . I still seem to see the combination of affection and despair, which marked the fine countenance of my young friend Doraiswamy, as I handed him into the boat, and the manly and

²⁹ Ibid., 20 January 1802, Ibid., Vol. 293, pp. 1318-1322.

silent misery, which his companions in affliction displayed, on quitting their dear native land for ever'.³⁰

The voyage lasted for seventy-six days. So rigorous was the restraint and so callous was the severity, that the enemy kept its victims hand-cuffed with iron in pairs and huddled them together throughout this long period of agony. However hand-cuffs were struck off from six of them, who were directed to cook food for the rest. Water, that was stored for the supply to the prisoners, was so meagre, that it soon exhausted. The patriots suffered such intolerable misery that many of them fell sick. One died of fever, while another slipped into the depths of the sea. The rest reached the strange land of Penang but no sooner had they landed than one-third of them, who were healthy enough to move, wandered at large as in bewilderment, vanishing into the ranks of the local population.³¹ With the banishment, James Welsh concluded, 'ended the most harassing warfare in which the expenditure of life had been profuse. . . .'³²

Reconstruction of Imperialism

Shamed by their wanton atrocities, the English proceeded to reconstruct and consolidate their sway. To conciliate the population measures were initiated already to reform the administration and to eradicate the oppression exercised by the European adventurers on the peasantry.³³ After order had been restored, a more systematic and vigorous policy aimed at the establishment of British power on a firm and lasting foundation was concerted. In October 1801 T. B. Hurdis, Collector of Dindigul expressed his hope: 'The complete overthrow of the rebels and the capture of the chiefs of a systematic and well conducted conspiracy afford the fairest hopes of speedily establishing in the south that system of permanent

³⁰ J. Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 133-4.

³¹ Madras Council, June 1802 Public Consultations, Vol. 266, p. 2807 and 15 March 1803, Military Consultations, Vol. 307, pp. 1249-53.

³² James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, p. 128.

³³ The Company withdrew that support, claimed by the European adventurers and usurers, and took effective steps to arrest and send them to Madras (Madras Council, 14 April 1800, Secret Despatches to England, Vol. 2, pp. 12-14).

government we have so anxiously wished for'.³⁴ The Madras administration entertained the same view and instructed Lushington: 'Now that the rebellion is brought to a happy issue and the instigators with their adherents either brought to condign punishment or dispersed, it is expedient that you avail yourself of the favourable opportunity now afforded and improve those advantages which the entire subjection of the country holds out'.³⁵ In November the Madras Council held deliberations in which Stuart, the Commander-in-chief, and Petrie another Member of the Council guided the formulation of a new policy.

On the 10th of November 1801 Stuart recorded in his minute: 'The situation in the southern provinces has engaged much of our attention since my arrival in India. The obstinate resistance made by the rebels in that quarter induced me to recommend that reinforcements should be sent to our detachment for the speedy suppression of the insurrection. That event has now been accomplished and the leaders of the Rebellion have been seized and executed. It remains to consider and decide on the measures most conducive to the permanency of that tranquillity which had been established with so much difficulty and expense. To disarm the inhabitants of the southern provinces has appeared to me, upon reflecting on this subject, to be the measure best calculated to secure their obedience and general tranquillity. We now possess the sole authority to the southward, the power of the rebels has been reduced or annihilated, our force is considerable and the people intimidated. Awed by the fate of the leaders of the Rebellion, it is probable the inhabitants will submit without resistance to our orders and every circumstance at this moment contributes to favour the plan of disarming the inhabitants so essential to the quiet of the country and to the public interest'.³⁶ On the other hand Petrie recorded on 10th of November: 'As it is fully admitted that the prowess of our arms has completely subjugated the rebels and as the destruction of their forts and strongholds, the entire dispersion or total ex-

³⁴ T. B. Hurdis, 22 October 1801, letter to the Board of Revenue, Board of Revenue Proceedings, Vol. 301, p. 13004.

³⁵ Secretary Garrow, 9 November 1801, Instruction to Lushington, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 115, pp. 821-2.

³⁶ Stuart, 10 November 1801, minute, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 2343.

termination of their most warlike hordes and the exemplary numerous military executions of their most revered and powerful chieftains must have convinced the least considerate, that their only safety is in submission: the period appears to be most favourable for adapting a system of unity and conciliation in the place of military terror and coercion'.³⁷ The Madras Council accepted the first view but not entirely the second, for the spirit of revenge still remained strong. The administration enforced a policy of disarmament attended with terror and coercion but without abandoning all the principles of wise moderation.

In their proclamation the British guaranteed to the inhabitants that their administration would honour the rights of property and life, religious usages and customs. Anxious to attain this aim, they introduced as in Bengal a permanent assessment of revenue, which sought to secure to the people their hereditary rights and to the chieftains the possession of land under the operation of limited and definite laws, free from undue interference by the servants of the Company.³⁸ The Company decided to carry out the disarmament of the inhabitants, but this was tempered with a degree of attention to the hereditary customs. In consonance with the proclamation all the inhabitants were required to surrender arms on pain of death but in return for due compensation. To prevent illicit transit of arms, a kind of pass without which no military stores should be transported, was introduced.³⁹ Manufacture of fire-arms was strictly prohibited.⁴⁰ Thus the hereditary chiefs were allowed to retain a fixed number of pikemen in order to enable them to maintain those ceremonies of state in which they had been for long accustomed.⁴¹ The English sought to rectify the injustice done to the descendants of the ancient ruling houses. Thus it granted an annual allowance for the support of the Rajah of Anagundi of the princely house of Vijayanagar who was denied the possession of his territory.⁴² Woorcad and Singampatti, retained

³⁷ Petrie, 10 November 1801, Minute, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, p. 7350.

³⁸ Madras Council, 5 July 1803, Political Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 833-4.

³⁹ Ibid., 26 February 1802, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 114, pp. 694-5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16 February 1802, Military Consultations, Vol. 294, p. 1525.

⁴¹ Lord Clive, 29 May 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 32, pp. 454-6.

⁴² Madras Council, 7 August 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, p. 1058.

under the administration of the English since 1798, were restored to their former chiefs. The Company assumed the administration of Ramnad in 1795 but in consequence of the introduction of the permanent revenue settlement in 1802 it was placed in the possession of the house of the Setupati.⁴³ As the administration of the West Coast was found inadequate to the needs, the English attempted to improve it even before the final suppression of the rebellion was effected. To accelerate the settlement of Kanara, a remission of the land tax for 1801 was granted and a few of the customs and duties were abolished.⁴⁴ The principles which were formulated for the reorganisation of the administration of Malabar were carried into effect. A principal collector and assistant collectors superseded the commission, that was constituted for the exercise of authority. This provided for centralised control.⁴⁵ These reforms were calculated to gain the loyalty of the chiefs, to conciliate the inhabitants and to strengthen the administrative system.

However in its attitude towards the rebels the Company decided to carry its vindictive policy to further extreme. It sequestered the *palayams* of Delli, Mangalam, Periapatti, Jallipatti, Tondamattur and Somandorai not only to punish the chiefs for their role in the Rebellion but also to deter others in the future.⁴⁶ As Panjalamkurichi appeared as a real blot on the prestige of British flag, the Madras Council, fighting a shadow, ordered that its name be expunged from all public records. This was announced by the beat of tom-tom in the streets of this fallen stronghold. The fort was demolished and the entire site was so ravaged and levelled, as the Romans did in Carthage, as to leave no vestige of it.⁴⁷ The harsh treatment meted out to the rebels was matched by the generous policy towards the allies in the Rebellion. The Company conveyed its feelings of pride and satisfaction at the steady attachment and loyalty of the princes to its authority. It promised to them

⁴³ Board of Revenue, 20 February 1804, Report, Vol. 3, part 2, p. 86.

⁴⁴ Edward Clive, 9 October 1800, Revenue Despatches to England, Vol. 7, pp. 96-7.

⁴⁵ Madras Council, 4 September 1801, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 110, p. 1669.

⁴⁶ Board of Revenue, 10 October 1801, Report, Vol. 3, p. 94.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2 July 1801, Proceedings, Vol. 289, p. 7707.

augmented security, favour and wealth. In recognition of the meritorious services rendered by the Tondaiman, the English ceded Kilanelli, a strip of territory from Thanjavur, to Pudukkottai.⁴⁸

To prevent the outbreak of rebellion in the future the English proceeded to implement more measures. Bush fighting and guerilla tactics employed by the insurgents greatly tarnished the British military glory in South India, for the Madras Council admitted that they brought the irregular peons of the rebels on an equal footing with the best European troops.⁴⁹ Determined to deny the advantage presented by the extensive woods to the inhabitants, the Company ordered the total destruction of the jungles of Dindigul and Sivaganga.⁵⁰ In November 1801 the administration issued detailed instructions: 'It is known from experience that the rebels hitherto secure in their recesses, defied enquiry and though openly submissive, in secret cherished with impunity the seeds of rebellion and traitorously aided the avowed enemies of the Government to whom they owed allegiance. The impenetrable jungle which surrounded their fastnesses rendered them almost inaccessible and the security afforded by nature where they were deficient in art, gave them the means of withstanding with too much success the arms of the power against whom they contended'. The villages were required to destroy the woods within their limits and to open roads not less than forty feet in breadth in the direction of the neighbouring villages.⁵¹ The numerous forts and other mud works, made by the insurgents, were demolished and periodical inspection was instituted to prevent the reconstruction of the destroyed barriers. Military roads were constructed to provide for the quick movement of troops in times of emergency. Roads were cut in the jungle tracts of Coimbatore, Madurai and Malabar. Communication between Kozhikode and Srirangapatnam was improved.⁵² Establishment of postal services between Tirupatore and Piranmalai and with Palayamkottai and Sankaranainarkoil provided for the quick transmission of military intelligence.⁵³ In

⁴⁸ Madras Council, 5 July 1803, Political Consultations, Vol. 10, pp. 833-4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24 August 1802, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 118, p. 2881.

⁵⁰ Board of Revenue, 30 January 1801, Report, Vol. 3, p. 168.

⁵¹ Madras Council, 2 March 1802, Revenue Consultations, Vol. 115, pp. 822-3.

⁵² Ibid., 2 March 1802, Ibid., Vol. 114, pp. 739-41.

⁵³ Ibid., 24 May 1802, Ibid., Vol. 118, p. 2881.

addition the Company set up military posts at the centres of disaffection.⁵⁴ It employed forced labour for the implementation of these projects.⁵⁵

However the British administration initiated no steps either to meet the political aspirations of the inhabitants or to reconstruct the shattered economy of the land. It agreed to respect the rights of property and life, religious usages and customs but made no attempt to rehabilitate their political rights that the people had retained within the set up of the princely institutions and village communities. The permanent revenue settlement guaranteed internal freedom in a limited degree, but it never came up to the popular demand. So great was the extensive devastation wrought by military activities of the alien forces and by the scorched earth policy of the insurgent columns that the country presented a gloomy appearance during the post-Rebellion period. John Wallace, the Collector of Tiruchirapalli, has depicted the appearance of the district in November 1801: 'Whole tracts of fertile land which in happier times were covered with habitations of the industrious cultivator and weaver are now extensive wilderness—impervious, and unknown to all but the wild beasts which inhabit them'.⁵⁶ If this were the situation in Tiruchirapalli, the havoc done in Tirunelveli, Madurai, Ramnad, Dindigul, Malabar and Kanara—the regions worst affected by the war—would have been terrible indeed. In fact the villages continued deserted for long. The peasants with their cattle and utensils languished in the fastnesses of the hills. The great loss of men and cattle, extensive migrations and deliberate destruction of villages presented a sordid and melancholy spectacle. The vindictive English in addition to the execution and banishment of patriots and confiscation of their properties, pursued a ruthless policy of employing the surviving insurgents in irons in numerous gangs to destroy the forts and barriers constructed for the struggle, for clearing the thick woods, establishing posts for the Company, and making military roads. The forced labour to which the miserable victims were subjected retarded the economic recovery of the country.⁵⁷ While no humanitarian consideration

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1 December 1801, Military Consultations, Vol. 289, pp. 7669-70.

⁵⁵ Board of Revenue, 30 January 1801, Report, Vol. 3, p. 168.

⁵⁶ John Wallace, 19 November 1801, letter to Madras, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 303, p. 13924.

⁵⁷ Board of Revenue, 30 January 1801, Report, Vol. 3, p. 168.

engaged the attention of the enemy in attaining the economic reconstruction, they lamented that the value of the villages of the southern territories was so materially reduced that no longer did they yield that revenue which they did in the past.⁵⁸

Discomfiture in Bel Country

Undeterred by these adverse developments, the remnant of the confederate powers carried on the struggle. In West Mysore Krishnappa Nayak of the Bel Country upheld the banner of resistance. After the most formidable of the rebel powers had been liquidated, the enemy issued orders for the movement of the troops to Bellum. In December 1801 Colonel Wellesley assembled them at Srirangapatnam. On the 5th of January 1802 he led the expedition to the west. A brigade of cavalry commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Macalister joined him on the 8th at Chinnarayapatnam.

Wellesley examined the forest of Arisikarai; he found it fortified everywhere. Deciding to attack the barriers from three sides, he divided the infantry into three corps, one under Lieutenant Colonel Spry, the second under Major English, and the third under Lieutenant Colonel Cuppage. Macalister was directed to occupy the valley adjoining the hills and the infantry of the Rajah of Mysore to cut off the rebel retreat to the Ghats. On the 16th of January the three divisions commenced a simultaneous thrust on Arisikarai. Deprived of the possibility of confederate support, the rebels could not sustain the concentrated attack. They made a valiant endeavour to stick to their lines but were beaten off.⁵⁹ The enemy advancing through the thick forests, launched a spirited attack and took possession of the principal barriers. This was followed by an entire dispersion of the force of the rebels. Subramonia Ghat passed under the control of the Company, in consequence of which it re-established communications between Mysore and Kanara. Krishnappa Nayak was taken prisoner and executed.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lushington, 20 June 1801, letter to the Board of Revenue, Tinnevely Records, No. 3579, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Madras Council, 26 January 1802, Military Consultations, Vol. 292, pp. 443-7.

⁶⁰ Edward Clive, 17 February 1802, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 32, pp. 334-5.

Malabar Again in Commotion

It is not certain whether the fugitives who fled Tamilnadu went over to the rebels of Malabar. The records of the Company seldom shed any light. Many of them were seized by the enemy or perished in the jungles of Anamalai because of hill fever. However, it was probable that the survivors went over to their compatriots in the mountain ranges of Wynaad not only by virtue of the close alliance that existed between the rebels of Malabar, Coimbatore and Dindigul but also because of the dangers involved in the occupation of the inhospitable woods of Anamalai, exposed to the search by the hostile parties from the eastern region held by the English and the western region, ruled by their allies, the Rajahs of Travancore and Cochin. The innovation carried into effect hastily and imprudently by the British administration in Malabar in the mean-time sent a wave of revulsion throughout the coast. Major Maclead, the Principal Collector of Malabar, anxious to replenish the coffers exhausted by the prolonged military operations, enforced in 1802 a sudden enhancement of the assessment on land by twenty per cent and an alteration in the rates of exchange. These rash measures threw the routine transactions of all classes of the inhabitants into embarrassment.⁶¹

The leaders of the rebellion, who were languishing under fallen hopes, again emerged from their mountain caves to spearhead the movement. From his stronghold at the Pulpalli Pagoda Edathara Kunjan issued an appeal for continued struggle. The response was spontaneous. In October 1802 the rebellion again spread and by March 1803 the entire province rose *en masse*.⁶² The working classes and peasant communities particularly the Kurichiyas Kurimar and Kurumbar supplied the fighting force to the insurrection.⁶³ The Moplas of Ernad and Cannanore furnished arms and ammunition to the rebels.⁶⁴ In a bid to check the traffic in arms, the English issued a warning but the inhabitants threw the muskets and swords into the tanks as they did in the past not

⁶¹ Court of Directors, 24 August 1804, Revenue Despatches to Madras, Vol. 2, pp. 398-402.

⁶² W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, p. 534.

⁶³ Correspondence relating to Pychi Rajah's Rebellion, 26 May 1805, p. 324 and 1 November 1805, p. 409.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 February 1804, p. 237.

only to avert responsibility but to assist the rebels at the right opportunity.⁶⁵ In October 1802 Edathara Kunjan attacked the British post at Panamaram, held by a body of seventy men under Captain Dickinson, and cut down the entire garrison. He followed up this victory with the reduction of the British posts between Dindimal and the Fish Pagoda.⁶⁶ Talakal Chandu, a Kurichiya chief, in the meantime led an expedition to Panoratakota. He routed the Company's detachment stationed at this place, and occupied it. The rebels now descending from the hills embarked upon extensive depredations in Cannanore, Makkeri, Anjara-kandi, Kodoli and Tellicherry.⁶⁷ In February 1803 the English apprehended the possibility of a rebel assault on Kozhikode. The insurgents, imprisoned at this place, made an attempt to seize the jail and many of them, assisted by armed parties, effected their escape. They gathered in strength to storm the fort but this was thwarted in consequence of the timely arrival of British forces, led by Lieutenant Colonel Montresor and Major Howden.⁶⁸ The parties now advanced to Randatara. They destroyed the pepper gardens of the English settlers⁶⁹ and the cutcherries in Tamarasseri.⁷⁰ In May 1803 they infested Pyormalla and early in June established in strength in Kutuparamba.⁷¹

Soon after the outbreak of the rebellion, Collector Maclead resigned his office in despair. Rickards, who took charge, sought to curb the rebellious spirit by a two-fold policy of conciliation and coercion. He issued a proclamation rescinding the measures which had added to popular bitterness. The currency was restored to its former rate of exchange and the enhanced rates of assessment on land were promptly cancelled.⁷² In the meantime parties were employed for the total destruction of crops in an attempt to starve

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20 May 1805, pp. 313-315.

⁶⁶ W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 534-6.

⁶⁷ Correspondence relating to Pychi Rajah's Rebellion, 1 November 1805, pp. 409-410.

⁶⁸ Madras Council, 4 March 1803, Secret Consultations, Vol. 15, pp. 92-95.

⁶⁹ Correspondence relating to Pychi Rajah's Rebellion, 7 December 1803, p. 221.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20 May 1805, pp. 313-15.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5 June 1803, pp. 141-142.

⁷² Court of Directors, 24 August 1804, Revenue Despatches to Madras, Vol. 2, pp. 399-402.

the inhabitants to surrender. The Madras detachments, which were rushed to the Coast from Mysore and Tamilnadu replaced the inefficient Bombay troops in preparation for offensive operations.⁷³

In August 1803 the enemy commenced the campaign on a large scale. Early in September Lieutenant Kennedy, at the command of a detachment, marched from Kadnoor to Anyarkandy. A rebel column headed by Mena Rama, seeking to check the advance of the expedition, opened a smart fire from the woods. Soon it became general, but the battle was indecisive. The insurgents lost five of them killed, while Kennedy was wounded and disabled.⁷⁴ In February 1804 the Company put into the field a well-equipped detachment under Lieutenant Gray. It moved to Kalliad to attack the rebels of Chirakkal and Kottayattu, while another detachment led by Montresor moved along the opposite bank of the river, ready to go into action in support of the other. On the 25th of February, after passing a considerable extent of the country, the forces reached the Kalliad Hills. A running battle with the armed groups, who descended from the hills, proved indecisive. The assailants pressed on, carried the contest into the woods and destroyed a rebel habitation. The insurgents, however, led by Parappan and Kalliad Nambiar, crossed the river, escaping to Kottayattu.⁷⁵ One of the British parties attacked a rebel group on the 5th of April and killed its chief Manyatta Nandan.⁷⁶ Yet as these operations yielded no desired result, the Company offered rewards for the capture of the chieftains: 3,000 *pagodas* for Kerala Varma, 1,000 each for Kerala Varma's nephews Vira Varma and Ravi Varma, Emen Nair who rejoined the rebel camp after his betrayal in the past and Edathara Kunjan, who routed the detachments of Captain Dickinson and Lieutenant Maxwell.⁷⁷

In February 1804 Captain Baber at the command of his troops, began an offensive from Chirakkal to Kottayattu. He dispersed

⁷³ Correspondence relating to Pychi Rajah's Rebellion, 4 January 1803, p. 137 and W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 534-5.

⁷⁴ Correspondence relating to Pychi Rajah's Rebellion, 2 September 1803, p. 205.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 February 1804, pp. 237-269.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 April 1804, p. 271.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, June 1805, pp. 339-340.

two rebel parties, one from Chirakkal, led by Kalliad Nambiar and the other from Kottayattu under Kerala Varma. In consequence of these victories the detachment reoccupied Chirakkal and disarmed the entire population. On the 8th of July it encamped at Kottayattu. Pursuing the advance through the Kottiyur Pass the enemy reached Panamaram and set up posts at Vellaud, Koilodi and Kanjot for the consolidation of its gains.⁷⁸

Threatened with discomfiture, Edathara Kunjan sent a rebel party under Karote Kannan and Edathara Ponnappan to the northern region of Malabar and a second column under Karingali Kannan to the western region to reorganise the rebel defences. They carried with them the *niyogam* or address from the Moorikamar, the deities of Wynaad. Now more inhabitants particularly the Kurichiyas of Kurichipad and Nallurnad rallied to the standard of resistance. On the 28th of October 1805 Lieutenant Colonel Hill who was leading a detachment discovered a column of insurgents in the Edapadi Hills, moving through the high road to Kankanikottai. He charged the column but the latter escaped to the interior woods. Lieutenant Robertson, commanding at Manantodi came up with a rebel party in the Kattiketti Hills, but his endeavour to force a battle failed.⁷⁹

In the struggle that followed the patriots found it difficult to stand against the ubiquitous enemy. The tide of conflict turned in favour of the aliens. Captain Baber, supported by Captain Clapham, attacked a rebel party led by Kerala Varma at Pulpalli. On the 30th of November 1805 a running contest, that lasted for fifteen hours, culminated in a pitched battle on the bank of River Kagnara, a short distance from the Mysore border. The insurgents were routed and Kerala Varma, the principal leader of Malabar, and Arathankutti Nambiar, a staunch rebel of Kottayattu together with their followers were killed.⁸⁰ In another engagement at Pulinyal the enemy crippled a rebel party of Wynaad and killed its leader Edathara Yemoo, the brother of Edathara Kunjan. In the encounters that followed most of the leaders who included Palon Dairapan and Tondara Velappan lost their lives. Edathara

⁷⁸ W. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, pp. 540-551.

⁷⁹ Correspondence relating to Pychi Rajah's Rebellion, 1 November 1805, p. 409.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1805, p. 433.

Kunjan, sick and unable to escape, committed suicide.⁸¹ Pallur Rayappan was killed in an action near Nilambur in January 1806. Emen Nair was caught and banished to the Prince of Wales Island. Zamoodiri, who gave shelter to the two junior rebel princes of Pazhassi, was sent as a prisoner to Dindigul, where he died on the 3rd of March 1806.⁸² The reverses of the patriots and the fall of the leaders broke the power of resistance. The enemy thus extinguished the second flare up of the insurrection in Malabar.

The Last Flicker at Vellore

The patriots involved in the South Indian Rebellion made a valiant but final endeavour when they recouped their eclipsed energies in the organisation of a mutiny in 1806. After the suppression of the general insurrection of 1800-1801 the rebels made Vellore the centre of their activity. This place became, as S. S. Furnell had asserted, the seat of 'deep and dark intrigues'. Futteh Hyder, who was associated with the organisation of the anti-British Confederacy of 1800, continued his secret moves, as the result of which not fewer than 3,000 rebels of Kannadanadu settled either in the town of Vellore or its vicinity.⁸³ During the British military operations in the west many more of the vanquished rallied to the cause, upheld by the princes.⁸⁴ The English contributed to the collusion of the rebel elements against their authority when they unwittingly inducted into Vellore the remnants of the broken ranks of the insurgents of Tamilnadu. Besides the European troops, the garrison of Vellore in 1806 consisted of six companies of the first battalion and all the companies of the second battalion of the Twenty-third Regiment, which was raised in Tirunelveli soon after the suppression of the Rebellion in 1801. Many rebels who had been reduced to dire straits in consequence of their discomfiture in their struggle and the confiscation of their properties as well as the inhabitants whose relatives were slain by the English allowed themselves to be recruited into the service of the aliens.⁸⁵ With the admission of these sepoys into the Fort of Vellore, it became

⁸¹ Ibid., 10 March 1806, pp. 453-475.

⁸² W. Logan (ed.) *Malabar*, pp. 550-1.

⁸³ S. S. Furnell, *The Mutiny of Vellore*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁴ Secret Sundries 1801, Vol. 303, p. 344.

⁸⁵ C. Hayavadana Rao (ed.) *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol. 2, Part 4, p. 2748.

the meeting ground of the rebel forces of Tamil and Kannada regions, as Coimbatore had been in 1800. Thus the English by their sheer ignorance introduced a Trojan horse into their citadel. It is evident that the Peninsular Confederacy furnished in Futteh Hyder a leader for a fresh venture while the Rebellion of 1800-1801 supplied in the rebel elements an instrument at Vellore for the execution of the long cherished dream. Now the poligars too drew closer to the scene, as they found it possible to exploit the favourable circumstances that a combination of factors offered. As the English themselves had admitted, these enterprising chiefs began to take an interest in the developments, for they wished for a revolution and to destroy the British authority.⁸⁶ The sepoy and the migrants to Vellore entered into a conspiracy and held frequent deliberations, attended by the sons of Tipu. This patriotic movement progressed to such an extent that as in the organisation of the Rebellion of 1800-1801 the rebels exchanged betel so as to bind themselves together for the attainment of the common goal.⁸⁷

The English in the meantime enforced certain innovations in the administration of the sepoy establishments. They prohibited all marking on the forehead which were intended to denote caste or sect, and the use of ornaments, and directed the sepoys to cut their moustaches to a set pattern.⁸⁸ Added to these, Adjutant General Agnew, the butcher of the patriots, designed and introduced under his direct supervision a new model turban for the sepoys.⁸⁹ On the 9th of June 1806 upwards forty of these 'Agnew's turbans' had been put on without objection by the Fourteenth Native Regiment. Soon a concourse of several hundred men, who had already assembled at a distance not far off, uttered a torrent of the vilest abuse at them for having consented to wear them. The mob was dispersed, yet this was followed by several sepoys throwing off the turbans in a turbulent manner. However all were reduced to subordination and forced to wear the turbans.⁹⁰

The British administrators expressed different views on the issue. William Bentinck, the Governor of Madras, concluded upon

⁸⁶ Secret Sundries, 1806, Vol. 5, p. 2259.

⁸⁷ Secret Sundries, 1806, Vol. 1, p. 217 and C. Hayavadana Rao, (ed.) *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol. 2, part 4, p. 2748.

⁸⁸ Secret Sundries, 1806, Vol. 1, p. 269.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

enquiry and testimony that the opposition which came in the wake of the introduction of new turbans was destitute of any foundation in either Hinduism or Islam.⁹¹ A court of enquiry constituted with G. Harcourt, R. Gillespie, I. Kennedy and I. Munro to go into the question too found nothing so strange in this reform as to enrage the sepoys. It felt that the instigations of the captive princes and their adherents led to the organisation of the conspiracy against the British administration.⁹² On the other hand a special commission headed by Major General Pater had observed that the innovations in the dress and influence of the family of Tipu served as the causes of the conspiracy. J. F. Cradock, the Commander-in-Chief, in his report to the Court of Directors, dated 21 September 1806, had asserted that the alterations in the dress of the sepoys had been nothing more than a pretext; their real object was the re-establishment of the Mohammadan power. Major Hazlewood of the second battalion of the Twenty-fourth Regiment had supported this view.⁹³ However, a court of enquiry consisting of A. Scott, Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm and Lieutenant Colonel John Munro, that went into the issue in 1807, concluded that the view that the sepoys wanted the restoration of Mohammadan power was not supported by sufficient grounds. Highly dissatisfied with these divergent views, the Court of Directors removed Bentinck and Cradock from their offices and proceeded to review the several reports on the issue. It concluded as a last resort: 'Immediate cause of the discontent among the sepoys was the introduction of certain innovations in their dress, which were offensive, and, as they held, degrading to them; and that the captive sons of the late Tipoo Sultan, with their adherents and abettors took occasion, from the dissatisfaction of the Sepoys, to instigate them to insurrection and revolt, with the view of effecting their own liberation and the restoration of the Mohammadan power'.⁹⁴

It cannot be denied that the changes in dress would have caused concern to the tradition-minded, but being of minor significance, of late introduction and restricted application, it precluded the possibility of any widely organised conspiracy against the British

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 176 and 179.

⁹² Ibid., p. 280.

⁹³ C. Hayavadana Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol. 2, part 4, pp. 2750-51.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 2751.

rule. This is indicated by the early British enquiries and if the Court of Directors settled on its conclusion, it is to be attributed to its failure to locate the underlying causes. Restricted to the immediate and superficial factors, the enquiry in fact failed to bring to light the deep-seated causes that made Vellore a centre of intrigue and conspiracy. Had the English sought to investigate the implications of a large crowd, in a preconcerted move, assembling and abusing the sepoy for having consented to wear the Agnew's turbans, that would have perhaps led them to the discovery of the extent of the collusion of the sepoys from the south with the settlers from the west, but they failed and missed their real objective.

The rebels of Vellore as in the Rebellion of 1800-1801 endeavoured to bring the insurgent forces of the Peninsula under a common banner and to restore the monarchs to their former status of dignity. Collaboration had been so widely concerted as to gain support from different quarters. The inhabitants of Pallikonda and the sepoy detachment that was stationed at Wallajahbad, taking part in the conspiracy, offered their co-operation.⁹⁵ Another detachment that was cantoned at Chittoor was implicated in the intrigues.⁹⁶ The rebels of Vellore had entered into an understanding with the inhabitants of Arcot for fighting the common enemy.⁹⁷ It is not certain whether the disaffected inhabitants of the west agreed to rise in a simultaneous rebellion but they promised their support and co-operation. Steps had been taken for rushing aid from Mysore to Vellore on the outbreak of the insurrection.⁹⁸ Disaffection that had been manifested at Chicacole and Hyderabad in Andhradesa, synchronised with the defiant moves in several places in Kannadanadu and Tamilnadu. It was possible that the sepoys from the far South communicated their sentiments to their relatives and friends in the Subsidiary Force, stationed at Hyderabad and in turn the latter to Chicacole.⁹⁹ The sepoys held secret meetings with the inhabitants of Hyderabad at night and the intelligence, gathered by the Company, indicated that they had taken a solemn oath of secrecy and mutual support.

⁹⁵ Secret Sundries for 1806, Vol. 1, p. 546.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 2257.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 230.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 1799-1802.

The Nizam had complete knowledge of the plot yet transmitted no information to the Company.¹⁰⁰ The Chicacole battalion waited for the outbreaks at Hyderabad before it defied the British command.¹⁰¹

The patriots decided to rise in rebellion in the early morning of the 13th of July, 1806. The same date was spoken of at Hyderabad as the appointed time for mutiny by the Subsidiary Force. The people, friendly to the Company, warned the officers of the native corps to be upon their guard on this date.¹⁰² To herald this movement the rebels decided to occupy Vellore, as the confederates sought to occupy Coimbatore in 1800, so that they could have a stronghold in which they could secure themselves until the planned insurrection in other regions drove the English out. As part of their design they decided to seize a treasure of three lakhs of *pagodas*, deposited at Chittoor. In the meantime the insurgent forces in different regions waited to know what success attended the daring venture at Vellore and other barracks before they themselves plunged into the fray.¹⁰³ Upon the 'overthrow of the British sway, the patriots decided to elevate a son of Tipu as the ruler of Mysore¹⁰⁴ and to re-establish the independence of the Nizam.¹⁰⁵

On the 9th of July 1806 a number of horsemen with a large train of attendants appeared in Vellore, behaving in a very disorderly and riotous manner and engaging in sham fighting with each other.¹⁰⁶ A general rising was determined on the night of 12th July, but due to the intemperance of a *jamidar* it was precipitated before the appointed day.¹⁰⁷ At 3 o'clock in the morning of the 10th the sepoys at Vellore rose and commenced heavy firing upon the quarters of the officers and the barracks of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment. They annihilated a body of Europeans at the main gate and the guard of the magazine and gained possession

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 1677.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 1803.

¹⁰² Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 1799-1803.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 2257.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 2257.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 1677.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 234.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 1799-1803.

of the fort.¹⁰⁸ Moving to the building that housed the captive princes, the sepoys raised the cry: 'Come out, Nawab, come out, Nawab, there is no fear'. This was supposed to have been addressed to Futteh Hyder. Now a flag, an old one of Tipu, green stripes on a red field with a sun in the centre,¹⁰⁹ was hoisted on the flag-staff while all raised 'ding' 'ding'.¹¹⁰

The occupation of the Fort of Vellore represented a master-stroke of a co-ordinated strategem, but the success did not last long. White troops continued to hold isolated posts. As the mutiny came as a premature outbreak, it did not act as the signal to similar risings in different quarters. Disaffection was manifested on the 13th of July at Wallajabad and a defection was detected in the Subsidiary Force at Hyderabad¹¹¹ but they came too late and developed into no rebellion as to be of any assistance to the patriots of Vellore. A relief expedition, commanded by Colonel Gillespie, reached the rebel stronghold, bombarded the gate and forced its entry into the ramparts.¹¹² In a sharp engagement the sepoys had killed 113 Europeans but they lost 350 themselves. Five hundred of the mutineers fell as prisoners to the enemy.¹¹³ This marked the failure of the last bid made by the patriots under the inspiration of the South Indian Rebellion. The enemy proceeded to consolidate and extend its sway.

Episode of 1818

The tragic story of the struggle for freedom ended in an equally moving note when Doraiswamy, the youngest and favourite son of Marudu Pandyan, made a futile attempt to return from exile from Penang to the mother land. Much of what happened to the banished patriots is unknown. The saga of their ordeal passed into oblivion. What glimpses have come down to us testify that within six months of banishment one-third of them died in the strange land. The untold suffering that they experienced in

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 182-183.

¹⁰⁹ C. Hayavadana Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol. 2, part 4, pp. 2748-2750.

¹¹⁰ Secret Sundries, for 1806, Vol. 1, p. 234.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 1799-1803 and S. S. Furnell, *The Mutiny of Vellore*, p. 9.

¹¹² Secret Sundries, Vol. 1, pp. 182-183.

¹¹³ S. S. Furnell, *The Mutiny of Vellore*, pp. 7-9.

the course of the voyage and the mental agony that constantly afflicted them quickened their sad end.¹¹⁴ Many more would have perished subsequently prematurely.

In 1818 James Welsh, who handed over the rebels at Tutukudi for exile, motivated by the considerations of his health, landed at Penang. An unexpected visitor soon came across this Englishman. Welsh has described the incident: 'I received a sudden visit from a miserable decrepit old man: who, when, without the most distant recollection of his person or countenance, I demanded his name and business, looked for some time in my face, the tears ran down his furrowed cheek, and at length he uttered the word 'Dora Swamy!'. It came like a dagger to my heart; the conviction was instantaneous. My poor young prisoner stood before me; changed, dreadfully changed in outward appearance, but still with the same mind, and cherishing the remembrance of former days and former friendships. The casual hearing of my name had revived his affection, and I much fear, the mistaken hope, that an advancement in rank might afford me the means of lessening his misery. He even entreated me to be the bearer of letters to his surviving family, but I understood this was contrary to the existing orders, . . . and I was compelled to decline'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Madras Council, June 1802, Public Consultations, Vol. 266, p. 2807, and 15 March 1803, Military Consultations, Vol. 307, pp. 2149-53.

¹¹⁵ James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. 1, pp. 134-5.

CONCLUSION

THE BEST organised, the most extensive and the most violent of the freedom wars fought in the sub-continent by the common people against the British Raj, the South Indian Rebellion of 1800-1801, represents a unique endeavour in the country's march towards independence. A broad-based insurrection, it was waged in a series of phases: the initial outbreaks in consequence of the enemy's move against the Bel Country, the general rising with the rebel advance on Coimbatore, retreat to the woods of Sivaganga, the counter-offensive, retreat to the hills of Dindigul and the final struggle. The English inflicted a severe blow upon the insurgents by December 1801, yet the rebellion in its varied ramifications continued to strike at the strongholds of imperialism up to 1806. The area of the struggle extended from Kanyakumari and beyond Kaveri to Malabar, Kannadanadu and beyond the Krishna. In consequence of the withdrawal of British forces for operations against the confederates, outbreaks came in other regions too. The rebels of the Circars and Rayalaseema in Andhradesa took advantage of the situation in setting the Company's authority at defiance.¹

The patriots fought this grim and determined war for the attainment of a pre-concerted goal, it was the ideal of the freedom of the mother land from foreign rule. So exalted was the vision of an independent and united India that dazzled their imagination, that the rebels in their letters and proclamations made references to Delhi, Ganga and Jambu Dweepa. True that the entire country did not fall under European hegemony, but guided by a dynamic vision that is seldom surpassed, they decided to expel the hated aliens not only to liberate the occupied territories but, equally significantly, to forestall the subjugation of the rest of India.

Nothing is more striking than the national and popular character of this great movement. Swayed by the ideal of independence, that transcended all sentimental frontiers, numerous communities ranging from the war-like Marawas of Ramnad to the down-trodden Kuruchiyas of Malabar, the Hindus as well as

¹ Edward Clive, 15 October 1801, Military Despatches to England, Vol. 31, pp. 165 and 299.

the Muslims, the Tamils, Telugus, Malayalis, Kannadins and Marathas rallied against the common foe. Betel leaf, the symbol of South Indian hospitality, kept them bound together as in a solemn oath. What was equally remarkable was the co-operation that the insurgents, as real nationalists, sought even from the reluctant princes and Indian allies of the enemy. Though a few of the Maratha princes made common cause with the rebels, no prince of consequence extended his support. The Rebellion drew its fighting material, that was national in spirit though not professional, from all ranks of the society particularly from the lowest in the social ladder. As the British records repeatedly bear testimony, the peasants rushed to the arena of the struggle quite voluntarily.

From a determination so well concerted and so resolute, as it evidently appeared incompatible with any compromise with imperialism, there followed a grim struggle. Dreadful were the slaughter and destruction that wrought havoc in the warring camps. The English lamented that in this destructive war more European blood was shed than in the conquest of Mysore.² In fact they suffered the heaviest casualty, that they ever did, in any of the civil disturbances of India of the pre-North Indian Mutiny period.³ The rebel losses were, however, the most terrible. Ill-equipped and untrained crowds as the rebels were, they paid dearly for every engagement. Despite their shattering experiences, what was conspicuous was the spirit of chivalry that they uniformly displayed through the vicissitudes of their fortune. As the enemy itself had admitted, they gave no embarrassment to other white communities as they considered them as neutrals.⁴ They never molested the weavers in the employ of the Company, for they appreciated the economic distress that reduced them to that necessity. Release of Baggot at the instance of his wife, permission granted to the commander of the British garrison at Tutukudi to go away in safety and the magnanimity shown to the humbled oppressor at Panjalamkurichi, are a few of the episodes that

² Madras Council, 1 December 1801, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 289, p. 7353.

³ S. B. Chandhuri, *Civil Disturbances During the British Rule in India (1765-1857)*, p. 128.

⁴ Madras Council, 30 April 1802, *Political Consultations*, Vol. 263, p. 1625.

furnish glimpses into their modesty and humanity. In contrast the English administered their savagery with the crudest ferocity. They slaughtered the fleeing population, executed the messengers, hanged father and sons upon common gibbet, paraded the mutilated bodies of the patriots through the streets and piked the severed heads on the high ways. So dreadful was the horror that these vindictive outbursts of fury spread in the land that the ballads and legends, composed during this period depicted them with pathos so moving and frightful that they haunted the memory of the inhabitants generation after generation.

The Rebellion failed in attaining its objective while the aliens re-asserted their power. It does not appear, however, that it was because of any risk of adventure tried by the insurgents or because of any inevitability of doom. As a mass movement and an organised struggle, employing guerilla tactics, the rebels entertained to the last a supreme confidence in their co-ordinated strength for dealing with the situation. Even as late as in November 1801, until the outbreaks in Nanguneri were suppressed, they cherished a conviction that the trend of developments was not so gloomy as to preclude all possibility of ultimate triumph. However, a combination of factors rendered the odds experienced by the patriots, unsurmountable. The army mobilised against the confederates was that which had vanquished Tipu Sultan and conquered Mysore. This was, as Governor General Mornington declared, unquestionably the best appointed, the most amply supplied, the most perfect in point of discipline and the most fortunate in the acknowledged experience and ability of its officers in every department which ever took the field in India. This war machine seemed overwhelming for any major campaign, yet finding its power trembling in the balance in South India, the enemy marshalled more detachments, moved from Bombay, Bengal, Ceylon, Malaya and Great Britain on an emergency basis. More than what the English did, the decisive factor that rendered the rebel fortunes unsustainable was the hostile attitude of the princes. The devoted service rendered by them not only made the power of the English formidable but crippled the will of the patriots and excited dissensions in their ranks.

The English established their sway simultaneously in the southern and eastern regions of India. In a bid to nip imperialism

in its bud the people of the South organised themselves into a confederacy and challenged the rising power of the English. It was a paradox, however, that the Bengalis unconcerned with the threatening development and greater misery, slept, slept wrapt in deep slumber. When they woke up, they raised a storm in a tea-cup, but it was too late, for by then the rest of India had been engulfed by the forces of imperialism and the seeds of communal discord had been sown. In fact the countrymen of Bali and Ravana held aloft the light of freedom to the masses of the rest of India.

The South Indian Rebellion combined in itself the dominant features of the two subsequent freedom wars—the violence of the North Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the popular response of the agitation, that led India to independence in 1947. However, the differences were considerable. In the South discontent, both political and economic, led to a real awakening and that in turn to the organisation of a widespread insurrection. In the North, on the other hand, discontent, mostly because of a reactionary interpretation of the developments, caught a sudden fire through the grease of the cartridge and burst out; awakening and organisation did not precede it. This was why the Rebellion in the South lasted longer and the Mutiny of the North collapsed like a bubble. The Rebellion ended in a mutiny; the Mutiny ended with a rebellion. All the major powers of India supported the enemy in 1800 but several of the powerful princes took the side of the sepoys in 1857. South India set before it the ideal of freedom so that all could live in constant happiness without tears. Determination of this goal and unity of purpose rendered the struggle not only formidable to the enemy but truly national. S. B. Chandhuri of Bengal Educational Service in his bid to project a national image to the Mutiny of 1857 points out: the sepoys fighting for fear of castes, the chiefs for their kingdoms, the land-lords for their estates, the mass for fear of conversion to Christianity and agrarian grievances, and the Moslems especially for restoring their old sway, yet all in their own way may be said to have given the events of 1857-59 a national colouring—what began as a mutiny seemed to assume the proportions of a rebellion.⁵ This kind of argument is quite interesting. How could diverse objectives, at times contrary and contra-

⁵ S. B. Chauthuri, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies (1857-1859)*, p. 15.

dictory to each other, lead to a single goal? The imaginary bond of association, imposed by common hatred, would have vanished the moment victory, if any, had been won. It would have led the country to different directions, internal wars and a certain disintegration. This deprived the North Indian Mutiny of any national character. While the peasants of the South fought in fields and woods, the sepoys of the North fought in cities and barracks, though both the struggles ultimately failed. The national movement that assumed extensive proportions with the dawn of the 20th century took the country to partition and independence. It may be disputed who were correct—whether the peasants and sepoys in the employment of violence against the enemy or the agitators in their reliance upon non-violence. It is to be admitted that non-violence gained wider acceptance in view of the influence of Indian philosophy on Indian character and the English, tired of shooting down the non-resisting but verbally powerful crowds, agreed to exonerate themselves. But look at the brave Algerians, Israelis, Cypriots and Kenyans. Though tiny nations they were, they quickly expelled the imperialists. Why did 5,000 lakhs of Indians fail to do what the mere 5 lakhs of Cypriots wrought? We would have saved many lives but we would have lost vastly more in communal riots. We attained independence but we failed to preserve the territorial integrity of the country. In resorting to a non-violent struggle did we not lose an opportunity? It swept away the possibility of attaining a real emotional integration of the varied population of India and the emergence of a national army, adequately powerful to expel the alien intruders from our soil and to forestall the outbreak of communal violence and partition of the sub-continent. Can this be denied?

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THE SEVUNAS OF DEVAGIRI

A. V. NARASIMHA MURTHY

The period of the Sevunas, commonly known to his Yadavas of Devagiri, particularly in its later stages, is a conflict. This conflict arose among the Deccan Powers such as Hoysalas, the Kakatiyas and the Sevunas for political supremacy in the Deccan. By constant wars each dynasty exhausted itself and fell an easy prey to the ambitions of the Sultanate of Delhi. Based upon a close study of the original sources like inscriptions and the literature of the period, the present work represents a systematic and authoritative study of the Sevuna dynasty since Fleet and Bhandarkar and narrates their story from the time of Devagiri to that of Daulatabad.

A HISTORY OF BRITISH DIPLOMACY IN TANJORE

K. RAJAYYAN

Tanjore, reputed for the antiquity of its civilization and glory of its militarism, had a chequered history since the decline of the Cholas. In 1676 A.D. the Marathas established their hegemony and consolidated their position as rulers despite the opposition presented by Madurai, Arcot and Mysore. However, the situation assumed a different turn with the advent of European powers and the assertion of British influence ultimately led to the eclipse of the Maratha ruling house. As an endeavour towards specialised study, this work furnishes a succinct account of British diplomatic activity in Tanjore from 1749 to 1799.

BRITISH RELATIONS WITH HAIDAR ALI

B. SHEIK ALI

Haider Ali of Mysore was a prominent figure whose activities affected greatly the British interests both in Madras and Bombay. This study deals exhaustively with those activities as also with the ambitions of the neighbouring powers, chiefly the Marathas, the Nizam and the French. Haider actively participated in the struggle for power that went on to fill the void that had been created in the Deccan by the disappearance of a central authority making his regime both begin and end in wars against the Company. The consequent political ramifications are fully analysed in this work.

A CENTURY OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD

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This book presents an interesting account of the all-round progress achieved by Indian women during the last 100 years. Dr (M-) Shridevi has made an objective study of the role played by women in fields as varied as education, journalism, the Freedom Movement, fine arts, music and literature, and makes an assessment of their progress in different walks of life.

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